

S E R M O N S
ON
DIFFERENT SUBJECTS,

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S E R M O N I.

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Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life.

TH E great source of all human knowledge is experience ; and that experience which teaches us practical wisdom, and informs us of the many evils that constantly wait on life, is acquired chiefly by observation and reflection. Time, indeed, is continually forcing the instructions of this sage monitor on our notice, and when “ length of days ” has not made

us sufficiently acquainted with her, we fly to the aged that we may learn her counsels ; or read them, with sufficient certainty, in the misconduct, disappointment, and miseries of others.

THE historian makes it his peculiar glory, that, by faithfully recording the fates of kingdoms, by delineating the virtues which raised some to magnificence, and the vices which brought others gradually to destruction, he anticipates the future, by a true representation of the past, and teaches men wisdom by the examples of others. But though, from the short period of human life, the narrowness of our views, and the necessary calls of duty, we are obliged to recur to the experience of those who went before us for almost all our knowledge ; yet the few events that happen to ourselves, or that fall within the circle of our own observation, make a far more lasting impression on us, and have a much greater influence over the heart.



THE

THE strange vicissitudes of fortune that happen to others we hear with faint emotions, and often regard them only as they serve to gratify curiosity, and increase our store of knowledge. The historian's eloquence and the poet's fancy can scarcely raise the tear of sympathy, while they relate, with all the decoration of language, the miseries of life; and those sorrows which only the best and softest bosoms feel occasionally for the misfortunes of others, are but of short duration. They vanish quick as the morning dews dissolve before the rising sun; and often, like them, leave no trace behind. But such calamities and disappointments as we might call our own, are considered as dear-bought experience, and treasured up in the heart. These are the counsellors that will make us wise and good; unless in despite of reason and of nature, we let life glide away unnoticed, without improvement in knowledge or in virtue.

SERIOUS reflection on what has passed, with a constant habit of comparing it to the future, seems, indeed, to be a rule of moral discipline natural to the mind of man, and is one of the greatest safeguards of virtue, as well as the best means of acquiring useful knowledge. It is necessary, even from the fluctuating state of the heart, to take these retrospective views of life, and to settle stated periods also for our religious duty, if we wish to increase prudence, establish ourselves in virtue, and acquire the steady habits of rational devotion. A full persuasion of the efficacy of this discipline, induced the inspired author of the text to address his people in these remarkable words ; “ Only take heed
“ to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently,
“ lest thou forget the things which thine
“ eyes have seen, and lest they depart from
“ thy heart all the days of thy life.”

To this important subject permit me to call your attention ; and, as the most effectual means of rendering it profitable,
suffer

suffer me to point out some of those general concerns, which are continually happening to the sons of men, and which, therefore, claim your frequent reflection and serious meditation.

FIRST, let me exhort you, when you “ponder the path of life,” not to let the remembrance of your disappointments, whatever they might have been, “depart from your hearts.” Few there are, I trust, who have not met with these in some shape or other. Human hopes and expectations run so high, and the affairs of this world are conducted by so mysterious a hand, that we have almost daily cause to exclaim, “all is vanity and vexation of spirit.” Were our hopes, indeed, ever so well founded, and our endeavours exerted with the most vigorous perseverance, we are assured that “the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; but time and chance happeneth to us all.” Disappointments therefore are to be numbered among those

necessary evils, which our blessed Lord has told us, " must come." If the sufferance of them have been grievous, let the remembrance of them be profitable. If they have crossed your inclinations, or withheld from you fancied pleasures, let them not die away without producing their proper effect in moderating the passions, and inspiring that patient fortitude, which enables us, amidst all the storms of life, to maintain a character of dignified composure, resignation and contentment. Be ever attentive to the future, and fully expect that what has already happened, will again take place, in the endless revolution of events. This expectation of evil, as the lot of man, will serve to mitigate its force whenever it may arrive, and teach us to rely, with the most unbounded confidence, on the Almighty Father of our being, as the wise disposer of all events. It will open to us those lasting comforts also, which religion only can supply, and to which we fly with joy, as to the last asylum of our woes. It will point out
to

to us, with sufficient certainty, that this is not "the place of our appointed rest;" that those who would "fight the good fight of faith," must submit, with patient resignation, to the needful discipline of THIS life, if they ever hope to associate with the glorious "spirits of just men made perfect" in the NEXT.

WHEN once the mind can acquire these sober habits of thinking, it will be naturally led to consider, whether under the providence of an all-gracious power, our disappointments have really operated to our disadvantage or not. The vast and complicated system of good and evil which is conducted throughout the universe, is by far too extensive for us to view, as connected with events that are already past, and consequences that are now lodged in the womb of futurity. But let us investigate the matter, as far as we can, with candor and self-examination. Awaken reflection and appeal to experience. Consider those wishes which long since have

B 4 vanished,

vanished, and those desires which now have lost their ardor, and, perhaps, you will have little cause to regret that they passed away without completion, or attainment.

LET us apply these reflections to the almost general and predominant passion for wealth. Many a man, I am certain, has been the better for being in poor, or moderate circumstances. Recollect yourselves. When you have ardently wished for riches that were beyond your reach, if they had been granted, would you have applied them to the best purposes? Had you no vicious pleasures in view? No pursuits in which your innocence and virtue would have suffered? No gratifications which degrade the dignity of human nature, and which religion condemns as idle, unprofitable or luxurious? Answer these questions, with impartiality, and a sacred regard to truth, and, instead of murmuring, you will find occasion, perhaps, on maturer reflection and sentiments more improved,

improved, to bless that providence, whose guardian care withheld from you the means of infamy and guilt, by ordering you to tread the paths of middle life.

NEXT to the disappointments of life, I wish you to reflect on the sorrows which you might have experienced. This will open a pleasing field of instruction to us. As the land is more pleasing to the mariner, after his vessel has been dashed against the rocks, and he himself has struggled with the waves for life; so is the recovery of peace to those who have escaped the storms of adversity. Many are the advantages we derive from this severe monitor, if we knew how to enjoy them. She seldom fails to soften and improve the heart. Assisted by reason and meditation, she wipes away those numerous, petty ills, which vex the inconsiderate multitude, and which, from their constant recurrence, often form the sum of their misery. Man, unimproved by reflection, and untaught by experience of this sort, is a
poor,

poor, inconstant, miserable animal. Every trifling evil ruffles his temper, and for the moment makes him wretched. Even when no present calamity oppresses him, and no immediate danger hangs over his head, he will often form his own misery, and often be his own tormentor. Comforts meet him in the variegated path of life that are not enjoyed; blessings are conferred upon him that are never acknowledged; and, in this loose, disordered state of mind, the Almighty Father is too often forgotten, whose gracious dispensations ought always to "fill our hearts with food and gladness."

MANY, too many are there in the world who come under this description. Life passes on unnoticed by them; its joys and its griefs, its miseries and disappointments, afford them no instruction, and experience holds out her precepts in vain. But for a being that is formed for immortality, that is endowed with various intellectual powers, and placed in such a scene

scene of trial as requires their constant exertion, to be thus indolent and careless, argues the greatest debasement of character. Not to mention the motives that might spring from the interesting study of the human heart, and the contemplation of such events as frequently involve the happiness of our fellow-creatures ; nor to dwell on that Christian charity which should always teach us to share a brother's fortunes ; we might recommend this moral vigilance of conduct from the prevailing motives of self-love. In the daily conflict of human passions we must sometimes expect to bear a part ; and happy will it be for us, if we are prepared, by habits of reflection, previously formed, to repel such temptations as might assail us in the evil hours of angry pride, of disappointed ambition, or worldly sorrow.

To a wise man, indeed, the experience of every disaster in life will afford some good ; and one of the best distinctions that can be formed, perhaps, between him
who

who merits this appellation, and one whom the scriptures, with great propriety, deem a fool, is, that the former studies to fashion his mind, character and disposition to the condition of his nature; while the latter, from a blind indulgence of every desire that rises in his soul, and the want of exercising those faculties which distinguish him from the brute, journeys through life as though the discipline of its cares and sorrows, its pleasures and temptations reached not him, and therefore soon becomes wretched, and perhaps guilty, before he well knows that he has strayed from the path of duty.

THIS indolence and inattention to our principles and conduct, is one of the most fatal errors. It operates insensibly, and often leads to the worst consequences. We are, for this reason, justly commanded, “to
“ keep the heart with all diligence, for
“ out of it are the issues of life.”

To you, therefore, let the various scenes which daily pass before you, and those
concerns

concerns in which we all are interested, never wear an indifferent aspect. Consider them, study them, and meditate on them. With regard to the sorrows of life, we all of us, I suppose, have it in our power to appeal to experience ; and on no occasion can we appeal to her with greater advantage. From past afflictions we derive the most soothing comforts, and in the severest trials, the most amiable principles are formed, and the gentlest sympathies of nature originate. These too are the precious moments in which the soul dwells with more grateful adoration, and, perhaps, with a more lively faith, on the merits of a crucified Redeemer ; whose transcendant love and glorious example derive additional force, from his having been himself “ a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” Consider, also, if ever you have been under the pressure of calamity, with what an aching heart you viewed the unkindness and neglect of some, and with what gratitude and joy your soul expanded to the friendship and benevolence

lence of others. Remember what kind emotions and what pious wishes such conduct excited in your bosom, and do not forget *your* duty to others.

FROM a knowledge that sorrow has this happy influence in forming the temper, and regulating the conduct of man, our heavenly Lord pronounced his peculiar blessing on "those that mourn." It is from this pleasing, though melancholy experience also, we acquire that equanimity and patient fortitude, which are so necessary for us in this probationary state of our existence. From having already felt the pressure of calamity, you are no strangers to its nature or its force. When some sudden and unexpected blow, therefore, shall overwhelm your soul with anguish, let experience teach you by what imperceptible degrees the heart has again recovered its repose. Consider the silent operations of time. Call to your remembrance how the storm of adversity, like the tempest in the air, has spent itself as it
passed,

passed, till all around you was serenity and peace. Reflections like these will fortify your minds against those ills of life which are yet to come, and, in some measure, secure happiness, by repelling the force of misery.

LET me now direct your attention to a subject in which we are all equally interested, a subject which never fails to fill the guilty bosom with terror, and the heart of a religious man with a mixture of awful pleasure and melancholy joy!—I mean, “the house of mourning,” and the chambers of death. Among the strange variety of events that happen to mortals, death is common to all. How soon that awful period will arrive, which alters the mode of our existence, and wafts us into another world, we know not; all we are assured of is, that it must come, and cannot be very far off. Death is the debt due to nature; and as it is the last, so it is the most important event, that can happen to us in this world.

Here, also, let us endeavour to learn what lessons experience would teach us.

IT is not in the giddy and fantastical scenes of pleasure, that the mind improves in wisdom or in virtue; these for the most part are acquired by habits of reflection, and by taking such views of human affairs, as dispose the soul to thought and meditation. For this cause "the house of mourning" is a house replete with instruction, and is wisely preferred to "the house of feasting." It is there that our religious principles acquire an energy, not to be derived, perhaps, from any other source. It is there that those truths which were announced to us as glad tidings from heaven, and those duties which are founded on reason and contemplation, are strengthened and improved by the softest and most powerful emotions.—It is not sufficient for us weak mortals that we KNOW our duty, it is necessary that we should sometimes FEEL it. When, therefore, the calls of friendship led you to take the last
farewel

farewel of those you loved; when you wiped away the falling tear, and saw the anguish of a parent or a child; when you viewed the last struggles of nature, saw the shades of death gathering around, and heard the shriek of woe;—then it was that the soul became enamoured of virtue, and felt the importance of piety and prayer. In these melancholy moments we feel our own weakness, and see the vanities of life. Temptations to guilt and misery no longer court us, under the delusive forms of pleasure, and sin appears in all its native deformity. We confess the vice and folly of every mean pursuit, and the mind flies to religion for comfort and support. Awakened to a sense of danger, and terrified for our own safety, we lament the time that has been unprofitably spent, and resolve for the future “to wake unto righteousness” and sin no more.” It is then also that those divine truths, which can alone make us “wise unto salvation,” are believed with ardor, and admitted with joy. We pray, with earnest devotion, for the mediation

of our Lord and Saviour to secure us from the wrath that is denounced against past sins, and we trust, with humble confidence, in the Father of mercies, for that divine grace, which is at all times necessary “to
“ strengthen the feeble knees, and to keep
“ our feet from falling.”

SUCH are the sentiments which a christian feels in the house of mourning ; and, if “ we took heed to ourselves, and kept
“ our souls diligently, we should not let
“ them depart from our heart, all the
“ days of our lives.” We should recur to them, as often as the avocations of business and the duties of society permit ; and though the passions that accompanied them may vanish from the bosom, yet the principles they inspired should remain fixed and permanent.

IT is of the utmost consequence to take these retrospective views of life, and store the mind with the salutary principles which experience always affords. The efficacy

ficacy of this moral discipline will fully appear, if we consider the unhappiness of those thoughtless mortals, who are unprepared to meet any calamity, and are disconcerted at the most common exigencies of life. The ignorant and unguarded are tormented with a thousand imaginary ills, and no reflection teaches them to meet real ones with fortitude or resignation. Caught with light and superficial pleasures, nothing engages their notice, but what immediately strikes the senses. They sit idle and inattentive, while the wise man is forming maxims to regulate his conduct, meditating on past events, in order to withstand the force of sorrow, or "communing with his own heart," to moderate its passions, its wishes and desires. The fool strays through the variegated fields of life, without pondering his path, and without reaping any advantage; while the wise man, like the bee, gathers honey from every flower as he passes. In his mind the remembrance of those ideas which scenes of death create, will

not only supply him with constant motives to devotion, but also improve his temper, and extend a soothing influence over all his affections. He will consider those about him as his fellow-travellers, with whom he soon must part. He will be ready to make every allowance for those weaknesses, which experience only corrected in himself, and will be disposed to view the tenor of their conduct with charity and moderation. Fully satisfied of the vanity of worldly enjoyments, from the shortness of their duration, and the goodness of divine providence, which has not confined happiness to any particular situation, his mind is neither harrassed by the miseries and disappointments that wait on ambition, nor preyed on by any insatiable desire of wealth. Charmed with nobler prospects, and impressed with more exalted sentiments, he is never engaged in those mean and groveling pursuits, which cause such enmity and confusion among mankind. He is taught, by the strange vicissitudes of fortune, and the miseries
of

of others, to derive his happiness chiefly from the exalted satisfactions of piety, and the cultivation of his own mind; from a disposition formed to the worship of God and the love of man, by the precepts and example of the Saviour of the world. His sorrows and disappointments therefore are but few. In the figurative language of scripture, "he drinks waters out of his own cistern; and running waters out of his own well." Such is the character that maintains dignity and respect in every situation of life. In prosperity, we view it with love and admiration; in adversity, we look up to it with reverence.

STUDY, then, to acquire those habits of thinking and reflection, on which so much intellectual excellence depends. It is this will give you stability of character, and render you happy in yourselves, and respectable in the eyes of all men. It is this will teach you to unite prudence to virtue, without diminishing its ardor, and

enable you to join reason to religion without destroying the fervor of devotion. It is this too, that will distinguish you from that thoughtless and inconsiderate tribe of mortals, who, properly speaking, have no character at all; who discover no steady resolution to pursue good, and no constant care to avoid evil.

To render what has been said the more effectual, let it be always remembered, that it is the excellence of his intellectual powers, which exalts man far above the brutes; and the diligent improvement of these, is what forms the only meritorious distinction between one man and another. But let it never be forgotten, that all knowledge is useless, and all excellence vain, which is unconnected with the practice of virtue, and which tends not to sanctify the heart.

PERHAPS, angels and those beings who were originally created superior to man, or by gradual improvement in passing through

through different modes of existence, have become so in process time, differ only from man, in the purity and exaltation of their nature. Indeed, we can form no other idea of the Almighty Father, than that he is a being who enjoys the intelligent powers of rational creatures, free from every infirmity, in a degree of infinite perfection. The faint dawnings of wisdom, which we now enjoy, and the gradual progress towards perfection which the wise and virtuous experience, seem to promise to us a brighter day. Imperfect as our reason may at present be, it must, notwithstanding, be deemed a feeble emanation of that omniscience, by which the Great Creator “formed the heavens, and “laid the foundations of the earth.” We ought to cultivate it, therefore, with the utmost diligence and ardor; and though, after every anxious enquiry, we must stop far short of perfection; yet it is in the power of every one, under the divine assistance, to gain what is sufficient for the purposes of this life, and for

bringing to our minds that gracious God,
“ from whom every good and perfect gift
“ cometh,” with adoration, gratitude and
praise. He has clearly traced the path
of duty, and scattered instruction be-
fore our eyes in a thousand different
forms. Ponder well, therefore, the path
of life ; and, in “ pressing on towards the
“ high calling of Christ Jesus, our Lord,
“ take heed unto thyself and keep thy
“ soul diligently, lest thou forget the
“ things which thine eyes have seen, and
“ lest they depart from thy heart all the
“ days of thy life.”

S E R M O N I I.

THE CHARITY AND FORBEARANCE OF
CHRIST, CONTRASTED WITH THE
MANNERS OF THE WORLD.

MATT. xii. 20.

*A bruised reed shall He not break, and
smoking flax shall He not quench.*

THESE words, which St. Matthew quotes from the great evangelical prophet, are descriptive of our blessed Lord's ministry on earth, and afford us a striking instance of that sublime language, and beautiful imagery, with which the sacred volume abounds. There is an unadorned majesty, a simple grandeur found in the word of God, which we may look for

for in vain elsewhere. Considered merely as a quotation from oriental poetry, the metaphors in the text have uncommon force, and peculiar beauty. They are bold, but chaste; and express the most comprehensive sense with wonderful precision.

THE holy prophet is painting, in glowing colors, the heavenly mercies of our Redeemer's love; his great good-will to the wretched; or, to make use of more expressive language, his blessing to them that mourn, and his gracious favor to repentant sinners.

THE poor wretch, who has been shattered by the storms of fortune, or whose heart "has been pierced through with
" many sorrows," in yielding to the infirmities of his nature, is presented to the mind, under the frail, but striking emblem of "a bruised reed." And he, who has indulged himself in the lawless excesses of guilty passions, but in whose bosom the generous spark of virtue is not yet quite extinct; he, who though he has
been

been deluded, is not yet “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin;” but sometimes listens to “the still, small voice” of conscience, is likened to “smoking flax;” under which the sleeping fire may, with prudent care and timely attention, be yet re-kindled, or suffered, from negligence, to go out for ever.

SUCH are the peculiar objects of our Saviour’s love. Such is the weakness which he never bruised; but, on the contrary, was always ready to comfort and support. Such was the frailty which he would not cast off, or finally condemn; but which he studied, with a divine benevolence, to strengthen and reclaim.

PERMIT me, therefore, on the present occasion, to recommend the conduct and example of our blessed Lord in these particulars, to your serious attention, as a rule of moral and religious duty, which claims, in the most distinguished manner, our love and imitation.

IN

IN contemplating the character of our Lord and Redeemer, he never appears in a more pleasing point of view, than as the "healer of the broken-hearted, and the comforter of those that mourn." When we regard him as the heavenly Messiah, come from the everlasting Father, to teach us the sublimest truths and most important doctrines, we are awed by reverence and inspired with adoration. When we consider him as the soother of every affliction, and the gracious mediator for human frailty between God and man, we are smitten with love, and melt into the grateful emotions of exalted piety.

IF we compare this part of his character, as a moral teacher, with the practice of those who are ready to profess themselves his disciples, what a melancholy contrast shall we discover! The friendship, the charity and kindness of the world are often confined within the narrow limits of self-love. Men, in all ages, have too much resembled the Scribes and Pharisees of old,
who

who did good to those only who could do good to them. Few are the benevolent actions that flow from the pure source of christian charity; that have, for their object, the favor of God, and, for their reward, the secret satisfactions of virtue. Let the voluptuary, however, and he, who carries on a sort of traffic in good works, seeking his reward from man only, listen to the precept of his merciful Redeemer. "When thou makest a feast" or, in a more extensive sense, when thou wishest to shew thy liberality, "call the poor, the maimed and the blind, and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." But this is a rule of duty but little considered, and less practised. The intercourse of social life is, for the most part, upheld by gratifications that sometimes spring from interest, and oftener, perhaps, from vanity. Hospitality and kind attentions to the happiness and ease of others are generally bestowed on those who are least benefited

nefited by them, while the unfortunate may sigh unpitied, or, at least, unrelied.

How widely different was the conduct of the blessed Jesus ! He often visited the cheerless hut of poverty, the bed of sickness, and the habitations of the wretched. It was his supreme delight to seek out the fatherless and widow, and bid the afflicted be of comfort, wherever he met them ; to quell the wild disorders of dæmoniac phrensy, to hush the tumults of contending passions, and point out the path that leads, through the miseries of life, to the blessedness of heaven ! But, alas ! we cannot believe that “ the house of mourning “ is better than the house of feasting ; ” and shrink from scenes of calamity, as from something that would annoy our peace. The sorrows of others are often not interesting to the human heart, because they are real ; though from some mysterious principle in our nature, we are always ready to fly to the splendid
repre-

representations of fictitious woes, and there, at least, we can mingle the tear of sympathy with the sensations of pleasure. No sooner do we meet the face that used to fill our hearts with gladness, clouded with sorrow, than the ardor of affection abates, and sometimes, I fear, nothing remains of friendship, but empty expressions of condolence, or, perhaps, affected pity.

OTHERS, more unkind, instead of strengthening "a bruised reed," will often save their generosity by some invidious allusion to the cause of calamity; and vindicate their conduct by always combining misfortune with imprudence, or, if possible, with guilt. Such mean, ungenerous artifices are not uncommon in the world; but he who can practise them will find, if he examines his own bosom, that he has yet to learn the great duty of loving his neighbour in its fullest extent; he will discover that the very fountain of virtue is corrupted, and that all
his

his pretensions to real goodness are founded in hypocrisy, or, to use the gentlest expression, in self-delusion. He may be told, too, that he has not only deceived himself, but others also, in having held up a false light to those around him, in the sunshine of prosperity, which, as soon as the night of adversity began to gather around, vanished from their eyes for ever.

MAY such dereliction of principle, so inconsistent with the character of a christian, and so disgraceful to that of a man, be never charged on our conduct! May it be our peculiar glory, when we shall languish on the bed of sickness, and look forward to that awful moment which wafts us into the presence of the great Searcher of hearts, that we have never "broken a bruised reed;" but that we have, as opportunity offered, comforted the afflicted, clothed the naked, and fed the hungry, and that, with "true simplicity, and godly sincerity, we have had our conversation in the world."

OF

OF the number of unfortunate creatures that are dispersed throughout the world, some may ascribe their distresses to the mere accidents of life, or to that "time and chance which happeneth to us all;" while others, it is true, may regard their sorrows as the natural and just consequences of their follies, their vices or their crimes. It is the province of reason, and the duty of religion, to discriminate between these, lest we confound the innocent with the guilty, and bestow on the latter that distinction, which is due only to the former. Few, however, will be excluded from the wide circle of christian benevolence. Even the wretch, whose "soul cleaveth to the dust," who sinks beneath the weight of sorrows brought on himself, might be reprov'd in the spirit of meekness, and restored, perhaps, by timely repentance, to "that peace of God, which passeth all understanding." But what principally merits the censure of the law of Christ, is that coldness of heart, which is not interested in the fate of

others; which, if it knows how to “re-
“joice with those that do rejoice,” cannot, or rather will not, complete the apostle’s precept, by “weeping with those that
“weep.”

It may not be in our power to supply any, however necessitous, and however virtuous, with food and raiment; but misery, comparatively speaking, seldom springs from the want of these. Examine into the histories of the unfortunate, I mean of those who ought to interest us most, and you will find, that their calamities, if not caused, are often aggravated, by other ills; by ingratitude, oppression or neglect; by a nice and lively sense of virtue, that has been deeply wounded, perhaps, by the wrongs and insults of the world; by the loss of those, who were most dear to them; by a state of miserable dependence; and a thousand other causes, that would render the board of plenty a barren waste, if destitute of other satisfactions, and convert even the splendid
I habitations

habitations of the great into lonely abodes of sorrow.

HERE, then, is an ample field for the exercise of that meek and blessed temper, which would not break "a bruised reed." We can soothe and comfort, where we cannot cure; we can calm and assuage, where time only can still. Into the wounds of affliction we may often pour the balm of peace; and administer, with christian love, the comforts of religion, as a counterpoise for every ill.

BESIDES, we should remember, as a further inducement to the practice of these mild and amiable duties, that the hour of anguish, is always an hour of weakness. The heart is then often at variance with itself; we become our own accusers, without having been guilty of any crime; and think we suffer from our own folly and indiscretion, when only the cruelty and oppression of the world have overwhelmed us, or the dispensations of

heaven exposed us to trials of constancy. Such are the situations, in which we need the kind support of friendship, and admit with joy those heavenly consolations, which the God of all comfort "has administered" to us, through his ever-blessed Son."

FROM such scenes may you never wish to recede; but rather there "Let your light" so shine before men, that they may see "your good works, and glorify your Father, which is in heaven." Be always ready to alleviate the sufferings of the virtuous by every means in your power, and endeavour to reconcile them to themselves, in the many various and trying situations of life. Lose no opportunity of exercising towards the unfortunate, that "charity which thinketh no evil," and be ever willing to vindicate their principles and conduct, against the calumny and reproach of a selfish and unfeeling world.

WE

WE come now to consider the latter part of the text; in which our Lord's mercy to repentant sinners is manifested to us, in the language of prophetic inspiration, by declaring, that "smoking flax he would not quench."

OF the old law the most rigorous justice formed the basis. "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," was its general decision, in matters of right; and, in points that regarded conscience, the duties of piety, or the discipline of the Church, no provision was made, in case of disobedience, but the sentence was passed and executed, whenever it fell within the jurisdiction of those who sat in the chair of Moses, with unrelenting severity. In cases which came not under their cognizance, but which, notwithstanding, were an offence to the Almighty, no atonement could be made, but by the imperfect and doubtful practice of sacrifices and oblations; which, in time, became so prostituted, that they were an "abomination to the Lord."

IT was an office well worthy of the Saviour of mankind to supply this deficiency; to appoint some means of approaching the Almighty Father, even after offences had been committed against his divine Majesty, with humble confidence, in the hour of returning sorrow and contrition. The best of human beings, could never be deemed worthy of entering into the presence of that God "who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity;" and therefore it well became him, at whose birth the heavenly host sung "peace on earth, and good-will to man," to be the intercessor for poor, offending mortals, and to establish a law of higher authority; a law that required something more than the mere observance of the letter; that applied to the consciences of men; that corrected their sins, and helped their infirmities; that promised the sincere penitent assistance from above; and, while it punished guilt, purified the heart from sin. Accordingly, "good tidings of great joy" were announced to all people at his

his coming into the world; and, among
“ the many gracious words that proceeded
“ out of his mouth,” he declared, that
“ the Son of man came to seek and to
“ save that which was lost.” This blest-
ed disposition, which is, indeed, the foun-
dation of the christian covenant, discovered
itself throughout his whole ministry; but
more particularly in his beautiful parable
of the Prodigal Son, his treatment of
Mary Magdalen, and his occasional in-
tercourse with the Publicans and Sama-
ritans.

WE ought never to forget, that the
whole conduct of our Lord was meant,
as the highest pattern of excellence, for
our instruction and improvement; but in
no part of our christian duty are we, I
fear, more deficient, than in imitating
that divine charity and forbearance, that
“ long-suffering and great goodness,”
which we have been describing. Our
God is a God of mercy, and our High-
priest one, who can “ be touched with

“ the feeling of our infirmities ;” but man to man is often rigorous and unjust. The spirit of the gospel is “ gentle and kind ;” but the spirit of the world is too often cruel, persecuting and severe. Few are the wretched, who find in it an asylum from their woes ; few are the guilty that can enter a sanctuary, in which they may cleanse their hearts from the pollutions of sin, or learn, however desirous, from a course of penitence and prayer, to silence the upbraidings of conscience, and make their peace with heaven. The “ bruised reed” may be shattered without mercy by the storm of adversity, and the “ smoking flax” suffered to become quite extinct, without one generous effort of christian love, to kindle the flumbering fire beneath it. But yet we all have need of pardon and forgiveness ; and the grace and favor which we withhold from others, our heavenly Father liberally grants to us ; for “ he wills not the death of a sinner, “ but rather, that he may turn from his “ wickedness and live.”

It

IT is in imitation of this divine benevolence, that the apostle exhorts us to be
“ kind, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ’s sake, hath
“ forgiven us.” And can you doubt but that this is a rule of conduct highly becoming a christian’s profession? It is, indeed, a duty founded on the highest sanctions; on the concurrence of our own reason, and our expectation of forgiveness in heaven. Besides, it is just, as well as charitable, and admirably suited to the state of human nature. Nothing can be more fallacious, than to form a fixed and determinate estimation of any one’s character from his actions, conduct, and behaviour, at a particular season of life; because nothing is more certain, than that the heart is continually changing. For conviction on this head, let us commune with our own hearts. Who is there that cannot remember some habits, of which he would not now be ashamed, and some particular modes of thinking, as well as acting, of which he does not,
at

at present, see the folly and absurdity, if not the sinfulness and guilt?

A LITTLE christian charity would enable us to extend these reflections to others. Nothing has a worse effect on the mind of man, than to suppose it incapable of virtue, and, with a cruel neglect, leave it to its own depravity. If many have been ruined by unlimited indulgence, many also have, doubtless, been lost by untimely rigor and needless severity. How many are there who would now fly with joy back to the bosom of virtue, were not their intercourse with the virtuous utterly cut off! Yes, there are crowds of splendid wretches, for whom humanity might drop a tear, who once might have been regarded as the fairest and most amiable portion of the human species; but who now are lost to honor, and to shame; whose misery must be of the most complicated and poignant nature; whose hearts reproach them, without enabling them to reform, and in whose bosoms the reviving spark of virtue serves only

only to increase their anguish, 'till it is quenched for ever.

OTHERS there are, of a different description, who have returned from a course of vice and licentiousness to the happiness of virtue, and the blessed peace of godliness. Painful experience has discovered to many, not only the guilt and misery, but the vanity and "deceitfulness of sin." When the ardor of youthful passions has subsided, reason and reflection have succeeded the dominion of appetite, and "reclaimed the sinner from the error of his way." The "day-spring from on high" might have shone with fuller lustre on the minds of others, and they, who once "lived after the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof," may now "hunger and thirst after righteousness," and study to do only the will of God. Such too is the powerful influence of good example, of friendly exhortation, and wholesome reproof, that vice has been often forced to hide her head with shame, and "the
" hearts

44 *The Charity and Forbearance*

“ hearts of the disobedient have been
“ turned to the wisdom of the just.”

WHENEVER these blessed effects begin to appear, we should admit the sorrowing penitent with joy and gladness within the pale of christian love. Our confidence and friendship should no longer be withheld; that the wretch, who sometimes trembles at the rebuke of conscience, may with greater comfort listen to the warning voice of repentance, and perceive that the gate which leads to life, is not yet shut against him, and that virtue and religion are not without distinction here. This would be an act of exalted charity, and must hereafter rank us high in the estimation of our kind and merciful Judge, whose life on earth was spent in the redemption of sinful mortals.

THE reformation of the wicked, or, at least, the discouraging of vice and sin, wherever we find them, is a duty the more indispensable, as it is, in some measure,

sure, practicable to all. There is no one, however inconsiderable his station may be, but will do some good, if he uses all his influence in checking the progress of wickedness, and promoting the cause of piety, by active benevolence, and the example of a virtuous and godly life.

WHETHER, therefore, the wicked or unfortunate meet us in our way, let us be always ready to heal, and not to wound. Let us despise the mean and ungenerous artifice of those, who would derive a sort of negative virtue to themselves from the enormities of the world, and enjoy a malignant pleasure in publishing the frailties and transgressions of others; who build their pretensions to divine favor, not so much on their own good works, as on their comparative merit with the most atrocious sinners; and, instead of yielding to the voice of pity, or adverting to their own frailties, imitate the arrogant and presumptuous Pharisee, who thanked God,
that

that he “ was not as other men are, unjust, extortioners, and adulterers.”

MAY we always remember, that, next to the love of GOD, in the grand division of a christian’s duty, is the love of MAN. May this love be “ shed abroad in our hearts,” and shine with distinguished lustre on every occasion, where our neighbour’s peace and happiness, both here and hereafter, may be concerned. May it be further adorned with the meekness and gentleness, the truth and sincerity of the gospel ; and though every exertion of our benevolence, may fail of reforming the vices of some, and be insufficient to remove the afflictions of others ; yet still “ let us “ be patient in the continuance of well-“ doing,” cheered with the comfortable hope, that God will reward our “ labor of “ love,” and the delightful satisfaction, that while we have endeavoured to promote the salvation of OTHERS, we have, by the most effectual means, secured our OWN.

S E R-

S E R M O N I I I .

O N D E V O T I O N .

J O H N i v . 24 .

*God is a spirit, and they that worship him,
must worship him in spirit and in truth.*

RELIGION, before the christian æra, though always considered as necessary to the welfare and existence of society, as well as to the happiness of individuals, was cultivated with much diligence, indeed, but with little success. Whatever improvement the human mind made on other subjects that came under its investigation and enquiry; though
poetry

poetry was brought to a degree of perfection which it has never since passed, almost three thousand years ago, and the historian wrote with every grace of language, fixed the standard of elegance, and the laws of composition, when ancient Greece was in her glory; though the architect, the statuary and painter also of those times are still unrivalled in their respective arts; yet certain it is, that religion remained for many ages in a state of barbarism and absurdity (if we except one peculiar people) among all the known nations of the earth.

THE BEING of a God, indeed, was soon discovered, and universally believed. The stupendous works of the creation, added to the consciousness of self-existence, were alone sufficient to produce this belief in any rational creature, and discover, at the same time, two of the great Creator's distinguishing attributes. However imperfectly he might at first have been conceived, it required little exertion of the mind, even in the infancy of reason, to ascribe to the
cause

Cause of so much beauty, grandeur and perfection, an infinite degree of WISDOM and of POWER. Yet it would have been of little consequence for man to be assured of the existence, omniscience, and omnipresence of his Maker, if he had not been taught also, that he was to be accountable to him for his actions. The knowledge of this relation between the creature and the Creator, whether originally derived from divine revelation, the principles of reason, or intuitive perception, hath existed, we find, at all times and in all places, and is the very foundation of religion.

BUT much more was wanting to teach men how to “ worship the Almighty Father in spirit and in truth.” The comprehensive plan of divine providence was but little understood; the fixed and immutable laws which preserve the beauty and order of nature, were not distinguished from those contingencies which must necessarily arise in this mixed state of things, chiefly from the free agency of

man, his passions, his infirmities, and different pursuits. Nor were those causes sufficiently considered which make it evident, that this world is only a state of discipline, a scene of trial preparatory either to our exaltation to happiness, or degradation to misery, according as we have improved, or abused, the talent entrusted to our care.

HENCE originated the most unworthy notions of the Divine Nature. Every trifling calamity, and every instance of good fortune, was ascribed to the immediate agency, or partial interference of the Deity; and sacrifices were offered, or solemnities performed accordingly. Almost every weakness that debases human nature was attributed to Him whose perfections are infinite, and who is the fountain of all wisdom and goodness. Sensible of his omnipotence, men made their court to the great King of Kings, as they would to earthly princes, and attempted to bribe his favor, by such sacrifices and oblations

as

as were an abomination to Him, and a disgrace to humanity. Stately temples were erected to his honor, and these were hung round with gaudy trophies, as though he delighted in the vanities of human pomp and ostentation. Satisfied of his omniscience also, they so far mingled the corruptions of human nature with their religious sentiments, as to think that his decrees were to be purchased, and that the events of futurity were to be disclosed by consulting oracles and augurs!

THUS, as the great apostle truly observed, "when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." The most favorable view of paganism presents us with nothing but superstitious follies and the grossest impurities. Yet these mistaken duties of piety, as they sometimes proceeded from a sincere, though blind devotion, sufficiently shew the anxiety of the mind, its eager

desire to gain the favor of the Almighty, and make its peace with heaven. So strong, indeed, is this propensity of the human heart to worship the great Creator, that, rather than live without religion, men have greedily embraced whatever systems were promulged, however absurd; and, as the schemes of policy are always interwoven with the doctrines of false religion, it is observable, that wicked and ambitious princes have often used the ardor of devotion to kindle the rage of battle, and to extend the conquests of tyranny. MAHOMET, for instance, when he professed himself a prophet, aimed only at power; and founded his empire on doctrines, that were purposely adapted to gratify his luxury and ambition.

THAT it is the duty of every human being to worship the Deity, there never was any doubt. The question was how to worship him, and what services he would be pleased to accept. The world strove for four thousand years, a time long enough, surely, for
for

for sufficient trial, and never could produce a system of religious worship, or belief, which, as a WHOLE, we now think worthy of a rational creature. A revelation, therefore, was, doubtless, necessary to open and enlarge the mind of man, on this highly interesting and important subject. This seems to have been the opinion of one of the most enlightened of the heathen philosophers. The plan of providence is too complicate for human reason to develope, with any certainty or satisfaction; and the great first Cause of all things is too remote for the object of human enquiry. The mind, whenever she exerts her powers, is overwhelmed with the ideas of his nature and existence; and when we reflect on his attributes, contemplation must sink into reverence, or rise to adoration and praise.

SOME being, endowed with supernatural perfection, was requisite, therefore, to give us just notions of the Deity and his providence, as far as it is connected with the happiness of mankind. And to familiarize this

wonderful subject to human nature, some SENSIBLE means of instruction were necessary to ground a faith sufficiently firm for the basis of true religion, and practical virtue. This was the great office of our ever blessed Mediator and Redeemer, when he came to take up his abode with man.

WITHOUT such a gracious revelation, how should we know the will of the everlasting Father, or learn "to worship him in spirit and in truth?" Our minds are dazzled and perplexed with views of INFINITY. We might as well attempt to examine the fires of the noon-tide sun with our naked eyes, as contemplate the ways of providence without knowledge from above. Weak and helpless as we are, how can we trace out the operations of Omnipotence? Blind and foolish as we are, how can we pry into the counsels of unsearchable wisdom? And ignorant as we are of good and evil, how can we judge of those plans which are carried

ried on by infinite justice, and infinite perfection?

BUT though we have the precepts and example of Him who came from the Father laid before us; though “the day-spring from on high hath visited us,” and a system comprehending every thing that is truly sublime in religion, or beautiful in morals, has been established on the surest testimonies; yet mankind have not, at all times, made the best use of these divine favors, nor been sufficiently careful to form their morals and religion on the true principles of the gospel. Some have erred through ignorance or negligence; few, I hope, from design; and others have been misled by the prejudices of education, or some ruling passion in their own bosoms. As to the gross abuses of the Romish church, it will be of little consequence to enlarge on them here; but an attempt to point out a few causes of religious error, which are common to men in general, and to explain the nature of

our duty towards God, according to the true sense and spirit of christianity, will be of some importance.

THERE is an uncommon propensity in the human mind to consider religion in a gloomy and superstitious light. Many think its duties irksome, and its restraints painful and oppressive. The few, therefore, that practise it conscientiously on these terms, from a conviction of its truth, think it meritorious to live in direct opposition to the dictates of nature. Their characters are often marked with despondency and grief. A mixture of solemn reserve, and gloomy satisfaction, seems to pervade their whole system of life. They are persuaded that christianity requires a continual mortification of every wish, and every desire that tends to enjoyment, however rational it may seem, or consistent with innocence. If it relate to the mind, they term it vanity; if it concern the body, they deem it sinful. This wretched abuse of heaven's indulgent bounty
to

to man, has served to corrupt the purity of religion and injure its interests more than any other cause. It has frightened many from its duties, and deterred others from examining its doctrines. It has made some enthusiasts, and more, perhaps, hypocrites. Hence originated the ridiculous customs of flagellation, perpetual vows of celibacy, the confinements of the cloister, and other monastic superstitions.

THESE, it is true, are evils that are removed at a distance from us ; but the cause that produced them is general, though the effects are various. Look abroad into the world, and though you might not here meet monks and friars, confessors and professional devotees ; yet you will sometimes see a moroseness of disposition, and a solemnity of deportment, substituted for the practice of virtue ; and often find the visions of a disordered imagination, with a steadfast melancholy and rooted despondency, mistaken for the duties
of

of piety and the exercises of a devotional spirit.

BUT so far is the religion of Christ from encouraging such dispositions, and so far is it from tending to oppress the mind of a good man, that it ought to be his chief source of happiness. Rationally cultivated, and duly practised, it gives an additional relish to every enjoyment that virtue and innocence allow; and instead of increasing the calamities of life, serves most effectually to moderate their violence, by “setting the affections of “the heart on things above.” Even at the birth of our blessed Lord and Saviour, when the heavenly host sung “glory to God in the highest, and on “earth PEACE;” they closed their doxology, you may remember, with “GOOD-“WILL to man.” Previous to the Messiah’s entering on his divine ministry, he tells us, in the words of the prophet, that he was sent “to heal the broken-hearted;” and the spirit of the gospel throughout
speaks

speaks comfort and consolation to all that receive the word of God. In his last instructions to his few faithful followers, he observes, “ these things have I spoken
“ unto you, that my joy might remain
“ in you, and that your joy might be
“ full.” If you examine the epistles of St. Paul and the other apostles, you will find that a degree of inexpressible comfort, joy, and satisfaction, pervades the whole. Very different indeed from the trifling pleasures of this world ; pleasures, like the “ living waters” in the gospel, “ springing
“ up into everlasting life ;” pleasures that resulted from a conscious discharge of duty, and a full persuasion, that in every difficulty and danger, they were under the guardian care of providence ; pleasures of a serious and composed nature, such as pious contemplation on the grandest subjects that ever interested the human mind, afforded, “ a conscience void of offence,” and an habitual intercourse with heaven.

INSTEAD,

INSTEAD, therefore, of considering religion as a painful and irksome task, we ought to hunger and thirst after that righteousness which it inculcates, and it should be our meat and drink to do the will of God. The calls of christianity, instead of being thought grievous, will be found, when thoroughly understood, to be the noblest privilege of man. What, indeed, can give us so exalted an idea of our nature, as the consideration that we are in a condition of approaching still nearer and nearer to perfection, and are the peculiar objects of divine care ! There is no other creature, as far as we can perceive, amidst the infinite variety of creation, that has the least idea of its Maker, or that can be a proper object either of future punishment or reward. But man is invited into the arms of divine mercy ; graciously called to associate with angels, and “ the spirits of just men made perfect ;” and that, not on the wretched terms of leading a life of misery and brooding care ; but on condition that he embraces

embraces a system that fills his mind with inexhaustible stores of intellectual treasure; a system that multiplies all the rational enjoyments of life; that medicates its woes, and teaches us to worship the Almighty Father "in spirit and in truth." Who then, except the guilty, unrepentant sinner, the superstitious, the timorous and the weak, can consider it as burdensome, or hear its injunctions with melancholy and despair?

THE primitive professors of christianity, we may observe, were of all men the most persecuted and distressed by others; but in themselves they were most happy and contented. They eat the frugal meal, which providence allotted them, with thankfulness, and, though surrounded with poverty and distress, were ever ready to sing their hymns of joy. They were by no means inattentive to the duties of life while here; but they took care to be, in their intercourse with the world, as "wise as serpents, and as harmless as doves." They
were

were perfectly assured, that, while their blessed Master forbad the indulgence of every intemperate appetite, and every lawless desire; while he checked every wish that led to guilty and luxurious pleasures, or that tended to corrupt the integrity of the heart; he inculcated also, that a moderate enjoyment of the bounties of providence, and a mind disposed to live contented under its dispensations, is one of the first duties of every human being.

WHATEVER might be the pretended merits of continual mortification, the gracious and all-bountiful Father can be pleased only with VOLUNTARY obedience. Indeed, his service is, what our Liturgy properly calls, "PERFECT FREEDOM." He can be satisfied with no duties that come reluctantly from a rebellious spirit, or that are performed in direct violence to nature; but requires to be loved "with all our heart, with all our mind, and with all our strength. The great and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity," could not, indeed,

deed, consistently with his perfections, command any religious duties, or prescribe any external observances to his honor, that interrupted, or destroyed, the TRUE happiness of his creatures. As to those enjoyments which the mere vanities of life, or the indulgence of vicious appetites afford, we need not wonder that THEY are forbidden, because reason and experience sufficiently assure us, that the PLEASURES, as well as “the SORROWS of the world, “often lead to death.”

WE are, it is true, surrounded with temptations, and subject to various ills; but if we examine our blessed religion we shall find, that one great object of it is, to furnish us with sufficient strength to overcome them; and the few precepts, which to some may appear to lay too great a restraint on their conduct, will be found, on maturer deliberation, excellently adapted to correct those extravagancies of the imagination which lead to dangerous pursuits, and those mistaken
notions

notions of happiness which often end in disappointment, or in tainting the heart with guilt.

OUR Lord, while he withdrew us from every improper scene, and taught us to overcome the deceitful pleasures of the world, directed our minds to the sources of permanent felicity. If he withheld from us sensual pleasures, that quickly die away, he gave us intellectual joys that never will desert us. He prescribed a system of moral and religious duty, the rational observance of which was meant to give us dignity and happiness in this world, and crown us with immortal glory in the next. Well, therefore, might the Saviour of the world compare every one who heard his doctrine and practised it, "to a wise man that built his house upon a rock;" and well might he liken him who heard it not, "to the foolish man that built his house upon the sand."

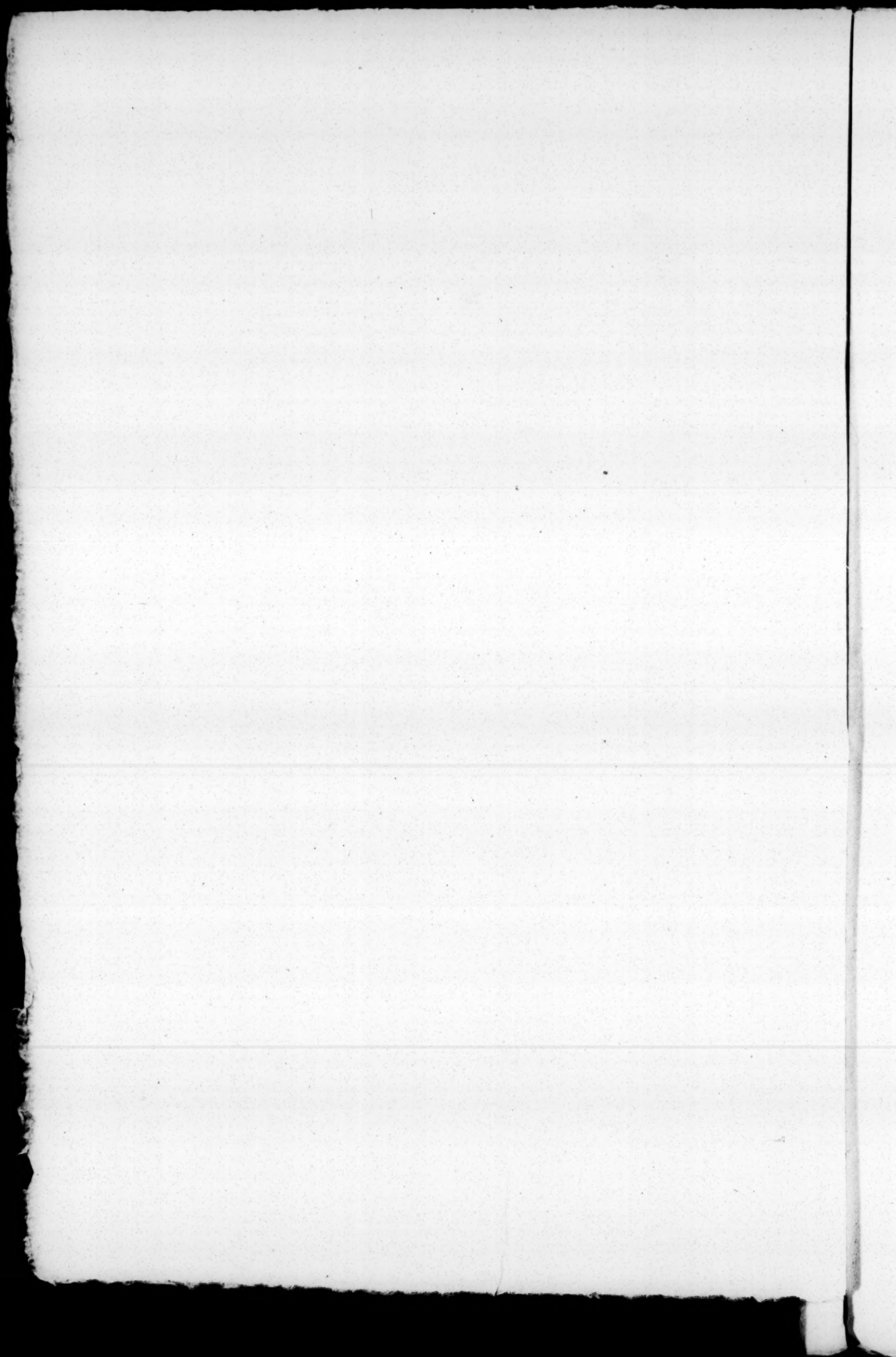
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If such views of christianity should appear to you rational and well-founded, endeavour to form your practice and principles accordingly; but, at the same time, think and examine for yourselves. Do not live in ignorance, or perplexity, on the most important concern of life, for want of exerting your intellectual powers; nor suffer yourselves to be misled, either by the errors or superstitions of others. Above all things, strive to overcome that coldness of heart, that negligence and dreaming indolence, which are so common in religious concerns. This is an error, to call it by no severer term, of all others the most fatal. The folly of it can only be equalled by its danger and its guilt. In a heart thus careless of the divine favor, and insensible to its bounty, no fruit can spring. Some, it is true, may resemble the neglected soil that produced only thorns and briars; but this is the cold, "stony ground" where nothing grows.

You will ask, perhaps, how are we to create those holy joys and satisfactions? Must they not spring up involuntarily in the heart? If we do not find some portion of religious comfort there already, from our internal frame and constitution, where shall we seek for it? Is it not dangerous to force the mind upon expedients to enjoy a devotional warmth, which many are ready to confess they neither feel in their attendance on public worship, nor in the private discharge of pious duties? Has it not often produced hypocrisy in some, and enthusiasm, or religious horrors in others; first, by heating the imagination with fear and terror, and then, by substituting its disordered visions for the genuine operations of the mind?

THIS cannot, perhaps, in some instances, be denied; yet I will confidently assert, that, if the mind can be interested at all, if it has any capacity for intellectual enjoyments and superior gratifications, it can no where find such rational ground
for

for them as in religion. But this I hope to illustrate in the following discourse; in which I shall consider some of the many powerful motives that we have for earnestness and fervor, for diligence and constancy, in the performance of every pious duty. At the same time, I shall endeavour to state the subject under our consideration more fully, by some additional observations, and shew what it is “to worship the Almighty Father in spirit and in truth.”



S E R M O N IV.

ON DEVOTION.

JOHN iv. 24.

*God is a spirit, and they that worship Him,
must worship Him in spirit and in truth.*

IN a former discourse on these words, I was led, by the nature of the subject, to warn you against that coldness of heart, that negligence and indifference which are so common in religious concerns. I purposed, as the most effectual means of correcting these indolent dispositions of the mind, to consider some of the many striking motives that we have, for earnestness and fervor, for diligence and con-

stancy in the performance of every pious duty. This, with some additional observations, in order to shew what it is to “ worship the FATHER in spirit and in “ truth,” shall form the substance of my present discourse.

FIRST, then, let us seriously call to mind that great and gracious God to whom all our services are directed, and “ in whom “ we live and move and have our being.” Let us deeply impress our minds with the idea of his perfections ; his justice, his goodness, his wisdom, and his power. These are qualities we highly regard in the very imperfect degree in which man possesses them ; they are, indeed, the great objects of our ambition, our love and admiration here. And shall they cease to interest us only when we contemplate them in Him who possesses them in a degree of infinite perfection ? Shall we read, with wonder and delight, the page of the poet and philosopher, and shall we remain uninterested with the volume of nature ever open to
our

our view, from which all their real excellencies are transcribed? Such are the considerations which cool, abstracted reason, will suggest, and, without much exertion, multiply continually. They have, indeed, their effect in fully convincing us of error and inconsistency, but they apply to the understanding only. We must have higher motives to invigorate our piety; motives that reach the heart. Accordingly when we consider the supreme Being as our Father, to whom, as children, we look up for protection, and our God, on whom our eternal happiness depends, such distant arguments are lost, and the soul is agitated by hope and fear, by awful reverence and anxious joy.

THIS indeed is the grand principle upon which all religion is built; that we are soon to be the objects of divine punishment or reward. It could hardly be believed, if experience did not too often confirm the fact, that a rational being, living with this awful truth impressed

upon his mind, should be inattentive to its consequences, and shew by his conduct, that he is indifferent to those duties which the relation between him and his Maker, as well as the condition of human life, indispensibly require.

WE are sufficiently assured, that our continuance here will be but for a short time; and yet the generality of mankind make such provision in this world, as though it was to last for ever. All their thoughts, their wishes and desires seem to center here. Here is their "treasure, and " here their heart is also." Though the scene is continually changing before their eyes; though a year never passes, but the remembrance of some that are no more, should warn them of the close of life; yet on they rush, with impetuous ardor, still chasing the gay phantoms of hope, and admitting with eager joy, the visionary pleasures of every new desire; in the mean time, the calls of piety are seldom heard, though morality, perhaps, might,
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in some measure, be practised under the form of worldly policy, or the odious mask of self-love.

AMID such variety of pursuits, in the heat of so many eager and contending passions, the heart can admit no impressions, from experience, sufficiently powerful to engage our serious attention, nor any reflections from reason, of weight enough to regulate the passions, or assuage the ardor of worldly desires. Thus are the interests of eternity often neglected, and the whole soul engrossed with the things of this world.

MAN, indeed, is subject to a variety of groveling appetites and vain desires. He is surrounded also with objects that strike the senses, and provoke their gratification. But these were necessary to constitute a life of discipline and trial; and we must not forget, that amidst a variety of temptations and allurements that would lead us into evil, there are objects also that court the attention of our intellectual powers,
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and that are not unworthy of beings formed for immortality. These, it is true, afford gratifications of a very different nature, and require the voluntary exercise of the mind to discover their intrinsic excellence and ultimate good. Yet how many seize, with eager fondness, the tinsel joys that glitter before their eyes, and neglect those lasting treasures which are to come, and which true wisdom would discover ! How many act, in spiritual concerns, like the foolish and extravagant prodigal, who parts with his patrimony in reversion, for what is sufficient only to purchase the pleasures of the present hour !

THESE reflections, I am sensible, are but ill-suited to the bulk of mankind, who, while the world smiles around them, or presents no scenes of striking calamity, are not disposed to direct the attention of their minds to any other object. They glide silently down the stream of time, careless of what rocks may shatter their bark, and unmindful of that awful moment,

ment, in which they must lapse into the tide of eternity. So far are many from being interested in their duty towards God, and those meditations which enforce it, that their frame of mind seems totally averse to religion; at best, they turn from it, as from a matter of little importance, that might be done, or left undone, just as it suits the prevailing humor.

LET me hope that these reflections do not apply to your conduct. May it be your supreme care, amidst the necessary occupations of life, to cultivate and deserve the favor of the Almighty. But in order to fulfil a duty of such consequence, you must inure yourselves to that discipline, which is necessary, indeed, to teach you its IMPORTANCE, as well as to enforce its PRACTICE. We become attached to objects, only by suffering them to dwell on the mind with pleasure. We think it necessary to allot a large share of our time to other duties, let there be stated periods also for our duty towards God. The mind can never
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be properly engaged where it seldom directs its attention ; nor are the satisfactions and comforts of true piety to be enjoyed, but by a stated and habitual course of duty, and the frequent exercise of calm and steady meditation. Do you, therefore, by this wholesome discipline, improve past events, and in some measure anticipate those that are to come. The portion of time allotted for our sojourning here is but little, and of that little much is already spent ; every hour, nay every minute that fleets away, is robbing us of more, and bringing us nearer to our journey's end. We are all hastening, by a quick and uninterrupted progress, to " the place of our appointed rest," from whence there is no retreat ; where no contrition, however sincere, can make amends for past neglect, and where those reflections, which now, indeed, under the blessing of God, may prepare us for happiness, will only serve to quicken the remorse of conscience, and cover us with sorrow and confusion.

IMAGINE

IMAGINE to yourselves that the time is come, when the shifting scene of life shall close, and this earthly tabernacle shall be dissolved.—But remember this is no flight of fancy ; no figure of speech to amuse the mind ; we are only anticipating an event which we are sufficiently assured *MUST* and *WILL* take place.—Fix your attention, then, for a moment, on that awful scene, when the short lease of nature is expiring, and the world, with all its prospects, is about to vanish for ever ; “ when the silver
“ cord shall be loosed, the golden bowl be
“ broken, and the fountain at the heart
“ shall cease ;”—then ask yourselves whether you think religion is to be trifled with, and whether it will then appear to you in an indifferent or uninteresting light.

GRACIOUS God ! in that trying hour, may we look up to thee with humble confidence, as to the rock of our salvation ! may we never know those unquiet moments which a wounded spirit causes ! but may our departure from this world be in
peace,

peace, and our access to thee prove “the crown of glory,” not “the sting of sin!”

FARTHER, let gratitude have its due influence in promoting our duty towards God. Let it frequently remind us of the distinguished rank we hold in the vast works of creation. We are not only called into a state of existence, but endowed with excellencies, far superior to what any other being enjoys, that comes under our observation; and this, only from the good-will of Him that made us. From the same source of inexhaustible goodness, every blessing flows that our nature is capable of enjoying. Though we might not experience the particular comforts, on which the blind partiality of our hearts is so fondly bent, and that, perhaps, only because they would eventually interfere with our ultimate good; yet there is no one that does not, in some respect, share of the divine benevolence. It is not confined to the transitory enjoyments of wealth and honors;

honors ; the grant of sensual pleasure, or an exemption from corporal pain. It is as diffusive as the light that visits us from heaven, and general as the dew-drops that enrich the earth. Whatever higher gratifications we may enjoy from the exercise of our minds ; whatever pleasure results from the cultivation of science ; whatever comforts flow from friendship and the dearer relations of life ; the never-failing joys of hope, the sweet delights of fancy, and the calm pleasures of meditation ; all, all are to be traced up to the “ Father of lights,” that fountain of goodness, “ from whom every good and perfect gift must primarily come.”

WHAT must the mind of that man be, who can fall into this way of thinking, without being interested and engaged in the subject ! But if this should notwithstanding be insufficient to warm his heart with religious sentiment, to give vigor to his morals and fervor to his piety ; let him dwell with steadfast attention on the office,
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the character, the system, and conduct of our blessed Lord and Saviour. Here, indeed, the glory of God and his good-will to man, will appear in a most transcendant light.

THE wisdom of Divine providence hath so ordered it, that, in this gracious revelation of its purposes and views, every religious motive is to be found that can possibly influence the human heart. If it be actuated by the hope of reward or the fear of punishment; there are such rewards proposed as cannot enter into the imagination to conceive, and such punishments denounced against the impious and disobedient, as the mind shrinks from with horror. If it be disposed to act from love and reverence, where will it find objects so proper for the exercise of these affections, as the Almighty Father, who is there revealed in "the brightness of his glory," and his ever blessed Son, who exhibited, for our instruction, a perfect pattern of excellence, that was at once
both

both human and divine. In like manner, if we are affected with a full display of the divine goodness, and capable of being directed to our duty by gratitude and love; or, if we wish to be led to obedience by that admiration and regard which are due to the most beautiful and sublime system of moral and religious duty that ever engaged the attention of man; let us look into the holy gospel, and all these motives will offer themselves with an irresistible efficacy, one should think, to attach the mind to piety and virtue.

YET if the heart should remain uninterested, and only the understanding coldly engaged; if no sensibility gives energy and spirit to our religious duties, let us lastly, and above all things, fix our attention on that tremendous scene of suffering and of death, when the Saviour of the world lift up his eyes unto heaven, and said, "Father, the hour is come." It is impossible for language to do justice, in de-

scription, to the emotions which we ought to feel on this awful and affecting occasion! Ruthless must be the heart, and blinded the understanding of that man, who can contemplate such scenes without feeling himself deeply interested in them. Such a combination of all the nobler passions that affect the human soul, no other event could possibly produce. If He, the most innocent and heavenly of all beings, has endured the most shameful, as well as the most cruel death; yet by that death he “has opened to us “the gates of everlasting life!” If he submitted to the violence and brutality of an inhuman mob, if he was buffeted and scourged, previous to his sufferings on the cross; yet “he was “bruised for our transgressions, and “these are the stripes by which we are “healed!” Such an uncommon union of grief and joy, of reverence and love, no language can possibly express, and no bosom, but a christian’s, feel. Let this then be the vital spring of piety. Let this

this give an energy and fervor to your devotion, not to be derived from any other source. With hearts enlivened by every principle and sentiment that can firmly attach and humanize the soul, proceed in the heavenly track of christian duty, with a spirit elevated far above the narrow views of the cold moralist, but equally remote from the superstition and ignorant enthusiasm of vulgar minds.

BUT though I wish to kindle devotion in the heart, and see the duties of piety spring from that source ; yet while I consider religion as a rational system of conduct towards our neighbour and our God, I cannot sufficiently disapprove of those unmeaning raptures, and those wild extravagancies of the mind, which are too often mistaken for the pure and holy comforts that result from the exercise of true piety ; comforts in which the wandering powers of fancy have no share ; comforts arising from Meditation on the sublimest subjects, and Prayer influenced by the

most exalted affections; by love, by gratitude, by adoration and praise.

BUT in almost every concern of life, we see men, who profess themselves advocates for truth, hurried into extremes by their ignorance, their prejudices or passions. It becomes us, therefore, to gain, if possible, that middle point of perfection, on either side of which lie ignorance and error. In order to this, let us be ever open to inquiry, and, for the rectification of our principles and conduct, appeal to the word of God rationally explained. It often happens in morals, as it does in religion, that men will endeavour to justify one extreme, by claiming a sort of negative merit in avoiding the other. Thus, the miser is reconciled to the mean and sordid vice of avarice, by publishing to the world that he is not guilty of riot and profusion; and the man who is perfectly indifferent to religion, who seldom thinks of death, and never of futurity, would claim some merit because he is no enthusiast.

fiast. May we all endeavour to avoid the imputation of either extreme, by taking an enlarged view of christianity, and impressing our minds with the perfections of that Almighty Being, who to the greatest wisdom unites the greatest goodness, and who has tempered the rigor of omnipotence, with the mildest justice, and the most transcendent mercy. This will supply us with all the grand and permanent inducements to virtue, piety, and godliness. But the suffering of one religious motive to take full possession of the heart, from a prevalence of disposition to indulge that particular passion to which the motive applies, is one great cause of religious error; and has served, in some measure, to produce those numerous sectaries that are sprung up in the christian church.

It is, indeed, natural for the guilty to think of nothing but the punishment that is denounced against them; and the man of a tyrannical disposition will be apt to

form his ideas of the Deity, from the depraved passions of his own mind. The timid and the weak also may be led to regard religion with too much terror. Its awful injunctions may continually agitate their bosoms with despondent passions, or disorder their imaginations with the constant impulses of fear. But it should be one great object with the teachers of christianity, to prevent "the poor in spirit" from dwelling too much on "the terrors of the Lord;" for if their lives are exemplary, it is to them that the blessings of the gospel are particularly promised.

SOME also, because they are told their Saviour died for them, and because they know that God is gracious, are persuaded that grace is to do all, and therefore are too inattentive to the practical duties of life, and take no care to "work out their own salvation." While the ignorant and vulgar of almost every description, borne away by the transports of an uncultivated, and

and disordered mind, neglect those permanent motives to piety, which the exercise of the understanding would supply, and are satisfied with an occasional hour spent in the gloomy raptures of an ignorant enthusiasm. Heated by appeals made solely to those passions, which are most easily excited in vulgar minds, FEAR and WONDER, and naturally fond of what they do not understand, they are transported into the regions of mystery, and easily mistake the momentary impressions which fancy admits, for those principles which reason should examine, before the heart approves. Hence it is, that the enthusiast is always bold and confident in asserting his religious PASSIONS for religious PRINCIPLES. Hence he is averse to that openness of enquiry, that calmness and equanimity which every wise and good man wishes to observe. It is owing to this elevated species of devotion, first kindled by passion, and then nourished by the suggestions of a heated imagination, that too many, I fear, have neglected the milder

virtues of christianity, which form the chief ornament of the human character.

WHEN the errors of so many mistaken men present themselves to your notice, let it be a motive with you to cultivate religion not only as a sacred duty, but as a rational rule of conduct. Let the understanding share in the pious joys of your devotion, and give not yourselves up to the loose and wandering impulses of the heart. At the same time, let your services to the great Author of all being, be performed with that fervency of spirit, and that earnestness of supplication, which are so necessary for us, and which are so eminently due to Him. Let not your piety, by any means, be a cold indifferent duty; but let it be accompanied with such emotions of the heart as become a rational and dependent creature. In the midst of those comforts and satisfactions which spring up in a mind formed to habits of devotion, “ be always ready to give
“ a reasonable account of that hope which
“ is

“ is within you, with meekness and with
“ fear.”

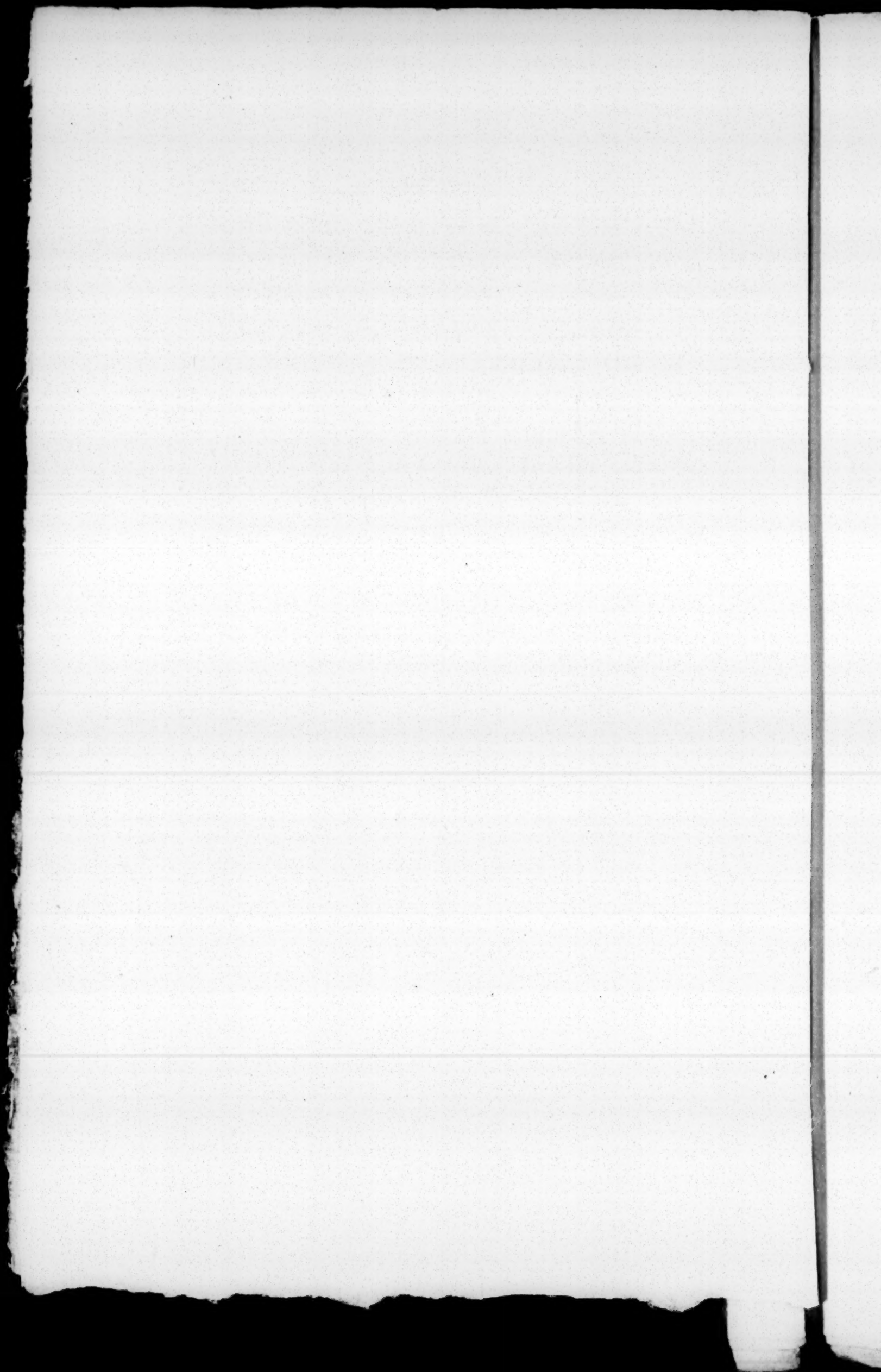
SOME might be led into extravagance, in their religious sentiments, by the natural heat and violence of their passions; and some from a blind and unaccountable zeal only for the mysterious parts of religion. Others there are, who from inattention to their education, or from the prevalence of vicious examples in their youth, have neglected to form any religious principles, or treated all religion with indifference. Should men of this description, when arrived to years of discretion, be so happy as to convince themselves by an impartial enquiry of the truth of christianity, they are often in as much danger of believing too much, as they were before of believing too little. The first ardors of devotion, generally have a tendency to enthusiasm. But we should always remember, that the religion of Christ is not calculated to produce those zealous transports which some have affected, and others mistaken for piety;
but

but is meant to inspire virtuous habits and holy dispositions ; devotion that does not occasionally break out into fits of rapture, but which extends its influence over all our actions ; which softens our hearts, and strengthens our principles ; which only slumbers in our bosoms, amidst all the busy occupations of life, and which is ever ready to preserve our innocence, or dispose us to the sacred duties of prayer, thanksgiving and praise.

LET such religion, then, claim an interest in your hearts. Let it often employ your serious meditations now, for be assured, it will be the only important object of your hopes hereafter. Add to this, it will mitigate your sorrows and increase your comforts in this world. It will ennoble your sentiments, and will, at the same time, both humanize, and invigorate the mind. It will always secure your principles against the assails of vice, and give you that intellectual soundness and sobriety of sentiment, which are the foundation

dation and support of every thing that is excellent in morals. But these happy effects, you will remember, are produced only by religion properly cultivated, and diligently practised.

MAY it be your peculiar care, therefore, to unite all the motives to godliness and virtue which the Christian dispensation affords, to animate, to strengthen and support your piety. May you duly consider every argument that applies to the understanding, and joyfully hear every appeal to the heart! For without this, however you may “worship the FATHER in SPIRIT,” “you cannot worship him in TRUTH.”



S E R M O N V*.

ON CHARITY TO CHILDREN.

EXODUS ii. 6.

And when she had opened it, she saw the child; and behold the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children!"

THE short piece of pathetic history from which I have taken the text, is as follows. Pharaoh, King of Egypt, a little before the birth of Moses, began to be exceedingly alarmed at the amazing increase of the Jews, who had now for

* Preached at the Parish Church of St. Mary, Islington, for the benefit of the Charity-Children.

many

many years lived under him and his ancestors, in a state of the most abject bondage and slavery. Their number, at this time, we learn, was greater than that of his own people. He was afraid, therefore, lest in some future war, they might join with his enemies, and not only obtain their freedom, but endanger the security of his crown. To prevent this, after having used two barbarous expedients without effect, he charged all his people, as the holy writer records, saying, "Every son that is born, ye shall cast
" into the river, and every daughter ye
" shall save alive."

THE history of the world, perhaps, will not furnish a more crafty, or inhuman piece of policy. In this time of cruelty and oppression, the miserable wife of a poor Levite conceived, and chanced to bear a son; "and when she saw him
" that he was a goodly child," says the scripture, "she hid him three months;
" and when she could hide him no longer,
" she

“ she took for him an ark of bulrushes,
“ and daubed it with slime and with
“ pitch, and put the child therein; and
“ she laid it in the flags by the river’s
“ brink: And his sister stood afar off,
“ to wit what would be done to him:
“ And the daughter of Pharaoh came
“ down to wash herself at the river, and
“ her maidens walked along by the river’s
“ side; and when she saw the ark among
“ the flags, she sent her maid to fetch
“ it. And when she had opened it, she
“ saw the child, and behold the babe
“ wept; and she had compassion on
“ him, and said, This is one of the He-
“ brews’ children!” But her compassion
was not a transient feeling, that vanished
with the sight of the object; it was not
a tear of pity that started involuntarily
from her eye, and then was wiped away
without any farther remembrance; for
we learn she had him nursed at her own
expence; and as the infant thrived under
her protection, she became still more
pleased with the object of her charity,
and

and at length adopted him for her son; And she called him Moses, “because,” said she, “I drew him out of the water.”

SUCH is the history of the childhood of heaven's great Lawgiver; and it would be an act of the greatest injustice to virtue, were we to pass over this affecting story, without remarking that the amiable conduct of Pharaoh's daughter does honor to her sex. In their bosoms, indeed, we are taught to look for all the milder virtues of humanity, and those endearing sympathies from which the chief comforts of life originate. Formed by nature, perhaps, for entering into the joys and griefs of others with a more exquisite sensibility than ourselves, we expect from them the willing tribute of a tear, whenever calamity or misfortune calls for it: and though a heart capable of lively affections, requires the strictest discipline, and is sometimes in danger of misery and guilt; yet it should not be forgotten, that it is often the source of the most disinterested

disinterested and benevolent actions, that can dignify or adorn the human character. Numerous testimonies might be collected, from the sacred volume, to warrant and confirm this assertion. The history of the text is none of the least. The great Jewish legislator was saved from destruction by the generous compassion of a woman. It was the protecting power of sensibility that sheltered the helpless infant, nursed him through his childhood, formed his manners, and enlarged his mind with science. The Holy Bible will furnish us with many more instances, and, if we look into the New Testament, we shall find the same kind and sympathizing disposition, which enables us to "rejoice with them that do
"rejoice, and weep with them that weep," diffusing its blessings through almost every part of it. The holy apostle, Paul, though persecuted from one corner of the world to another, though nothing but cruelty, dangers, and distresses followed him wherever he went, was not destitute of some few friends, who shared all his sorrows, and

served to mitigate all his calamities. But, of these friends, some of the most remarkable were women. In his epistle to the Romans, he thus writes to the brethren; " I commend unto you Phebe," says he, " that ye receive her in the Lord, " as becometh saints; and that ye assist " her in whatsoever business she hath need " of you; for she has been a succourer " of many, and of myself also. Greet " too, Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers " in Christ Jesus, who have for my life, " laid down their own necks; unto whom " not only I give thanks," says the venerable apostle, " but also all the churches " of the Gentiles." But there is a farther instance of divine compassion recorded in the gospel, which claims the gratitude of the whole world. When the blessed Saviour of mankind wanted even the necessities of life, when " he was despised and " rejected of men," and so poor, that he had not where to lay his head, we read, in the plain, unaffected language of the apostles, and we ought ever to remember it
with

with veneration, “ that certain good wo-
“ MEN ministered to him of their sub-
“ stance.” And though Judas betrayed
him, and Peter, after all his passionate
vows, both forsook him and denied him,
yet the fidelity of the few pious women
that attended him, remained firm and un-
shaken to the last ; for three of them, St.
Mark tells us, went to perform the last,
melancholy offices to his memory, and dis-
covered that friendship and devotion for
their Lord after his death, which distin-
guished their services to him while he was
alive. At the first break of morn, before
any of his OTHER disciples attended, they
sought his sepulchre, and with the rich
spices of the East, meant to embalm the
sacred corpse. This was the last duty that
piety could discharge. It sprung from the
soft emotions of the heart, when deeply
impressed with sorrow, and warmed with
the fervor of devotion. It was a duty
which the awful and affecting occasion
seemed to require, and which well suited
the gentleness of their nature to perform.

Other instances might be adduced ; but it is not my intention to utter an eulogium on female virtue. I am called upon to plead the cause of childhood, helpless poverty and misfortune. And if I have been somewhat diffuse on this pleasing subject, I was led into it by the pathetic story of the text, and a hope, that by exhibiting a few instances of the sex's virtue, they would not, on the present occasion, be unmindful of their dignity, but, like the amiable daughter of Pharaoh, feel for the distresses of childhood.

To excel in virtue is to excel in the best of causes ; and, of all the virtues that adorn a christian, CHARITY is surely the most distinguished. The word, in its original, implies every thing that is gracious, amiable, or benevolent ; almsgiving is but one of its fruits ; its purest source, therefore, is sensibility ; sensibility guided by prudence, and cherished by reason and religion. A virtue derived from such principles, cannot but be most
acceptable

acceptable to the all-bountiful Father of the universe, who scatters such innumerable blessings over the face of nature, and whose providential care and mercy extend to all created beings; “whose love is perfect;” who feeds the raven, and clothes the lamb, and who maketh his sun to rise, and his rain to fall, indiscriminately, upon the just and upon the unjust. Accordingly we find the whole stress of practical religion is laid on the exercise of this great virtue. “The end of the commandment is CHARITY,” says the apostle, in his epistle to Timothy. Again, “pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father,” says St. James, “is this; to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” No wonder then that St. Paul should prefer it to faith and hope, and affirm that it “is the bond of perfectness.”

BUT it is to be lamented, that the iniquities of the world have served to

render this most amiable of virtues, in some measure, inefficacious, and diverted it from its proper object. The benevolent heart of charity has often been open to the dissembling cant of beggary; and the lazy hypocrite has been relieved, while the fatherless and widow have wanted bread. Our streets swarm with wretches whose trade it is to abuse the generosity of those, who are alive to the cry of sorrow, and the complaint of wretchedness. Idleness has often extorted, by counterfeit distress, the tribute which has been denied to poor, but uncomplaining industry; and the heart of pity has often bled for the imagined woes of hypocrisy, but passed by objects of real misery, untouched, who have pined, perhaps, for want of food, but languished out their lives in silence. Others, who may really feel the distresses of poverty, and the painful afflictions of disease, have too often, I fear, brought these evils on themselves by their own vice and folly. Wretches there are, grown old and feeble in the practice
of

of wickedness ; the miserable ruins of lewdness and debauchery ; such, it is true, are entitled to our pity, but it must be pity mingled with aversion instead of respect. It is misery without either the consciousness of innocence, or the dignity of virtue to support it, and can only come recommended to us by the contrition of repentance. Charity to such objects is attended only with the cold satisfaction of having done that, “ which ought not to have been left undone.” It is enlivened by none of those emotions that melt the heart to TENDERNESS ; none of those feelings that, in an instant, prompt the hand to GIVE, and dispose the soul to LOVE.

SUBJECT to be imposed upon by such various and complicated arts of dissimulation as are practised in the world daily, in what sure channel may the rich tide of benevolence flow, without danger of being diverted into some useless or improper course ? Where is it that we cannot be deceived ? Where can we be as-

fured, that while we relieve indigence we do not encourage vice, but, on the contrary, cherish virtue?

THERE is no deceit in innocence ; there is no hypocrisy to be feared from the helplessness of childhood ; those whose tender years require the governance of others ; who are strangers to the world, and untainted with habits of wickedness, can never cheat you with the appearance of misery, nor impose on honest credulity, the fabricated tale of falsehood. Here too, all is open to our knowledge ; we know them poor ; we know them helpless ; we are assured, also, that no vice or fault on their parts brought them to misery and want ; but their only crime was to be born to poverty and misfortune. You will remember too, they are not Hebrews' children ; they are not the offspring of our bond-slaves or our enemies ; but the sons and daughters of our fellow-citizens, professing the same religion, and subject to the same laws. There needs no other

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motive,

motive, surely, to awaken pity ; and let no one pretend to charity, who can be deaf to such calls. On such occasions, the generous spirit of christian love may diffuse its benevolence, unchecked by cautious prudence, and unrestrained by suspicious fears.

FARTHER, it may be necessary for us to reflect, that charity to children, is one of the few benevolent actions within our power, which neither the malice, nor ill-nature of the world, can well misinterpret, or ascribe to unworthy motives. There can be no personal interest in relieving a CHILD ; nothing selfish can be imputed to the practice of such a virtue. He can neither contribute to our pleasures, by flattering vanity, or promoting our interests ; nor indulge passion, by administering to our wants. We can only enjoy the secret approbation of our own hearts, in giving food and raiment to poverty ; and, what is of still higher importance, in guarding innocence from danger, and leading infant virtue into the blessed paths of godliness, of science, and of social duty.

WE

WE may be highly gratified in seeing those helpless little ones, who now enjoy our bounty, thrive and flourish under its benignant influence, as the tender plants and flowers of the spring are fostered by the mild virtues of the morning heat, and the kind refreshment of the evening dews. Hereafter we may have the happiness, perhaps, of seeing them fill the most useful occupations of life, with credit and advantage. In the strange vicissitude of human affairs, who knows to what eminence some may in future rise, though now depressed by poverty, and dependent for their subsistence on the kindness of their fellow-creatures? If not to the dignity of senators or warriors, yet they may rise to the dignity of good men; they may become worthy members of society, and learn to discharge the kind offices of a fond parent, an affectionate husband, and a faithful friend. They may learn to do this, and bless those, whose charity reminds them from what source their merit and their virtue sprung.

Nor

Nor will there be wanting, I hope, among their young companions, their SISTERS in misfortune, some who will possess virtues corresponding with their BROTHERS, and add, moreover, a heart of sensibility, kind as the amiable daughter's in the text, to feel for the distresses of others, and endear the hours of social life.

BESIDES, there is something peculiarly powerful over the heart in the claims which children have to our benevolence. They are young adventurers on the ocean of life, ignorant of what adverse winds may blow, and of what dangerous rocks may lie in their way. As such, who, that knows what life is, can regard them with indifference? Nature, indeed, ever wise, has so ordained it, that we cannot well attend to their manners, their innocent pursuits, the progress of their passions, and the early operations of their minds, without associating with them ideas of tenderness. We see them pleased with the little prospects that lie before them, be-
cause

cause experience has not yet taught them the anguish of disappointment. Happy in the trifling joys that nature has suited to their years, they are as careless of the world and its affairs, as "the lilies of the field that neither toil nor spin." Supremely blessed in those spirits which heaven gave them, as yet unbroken by calamity, they are strangers to the painful intrusions of fear; they see not the distant storm that gathers round their heads, and think that "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Who would not stretch out a friendly hand to such objects, that they may still "go on in their way rejoicing?" Who does not wish to guard the human mind in this state against the first assaults of vice, and save it from misery, guilt and ruin? We should surely protect those first who have had no opportunity of protecting themselves, and whose distresses always spring from their misfortunes, not their crimes. Youth also is the season for discipline. The dispositions of the mind are then flexible

flexible and easy. No mistaken principles have added obstinacy to ignorance; no length of time has confirmed them in ill habits, or rendered them callous to the feelings of humanity. This is the fertile soil, which, if neglected, produces only thorns and briars to choke the growing seed of every virtue; but if properly cultivated, may prove, under the blessing of providence, “that good ground which
“bringeth forth fruit an hundred fold.”

SUCH are the considerations which make children the peculiar objects of our charity, whenever they are surrounded by poverty and misfortune; and such were the motives, we may reasonably suppose, that humanity suggested to Pharaoh's daughter, when she saw the poor infant cast among the sedges, that grew near the river's bank, helpless and forsaken! No wonder that she had compassion on him; notwithstanding the cruel decree of her father, virtue could overcome power; but then the object of her pity was, of
all

all others, perhaps, the most powerful over a feeling heart. It was helpless innocence ! Innocence, forced to be abandoned even by a MOTHER'S fondness, that cried for pity, and was about to perish. Who could resist the powerful impulse ? Surely no one ; therefore, " when she had " opened it," says the inspired writer of his own misfortunes, " she saw the child, " and behold the babe wept, and she " had compassion on him, and she said," doubtless in the true accents of pity, " this " is one of the Hebrews' children."

THE same object that wakened kindness in the bosom of Pharaoh's daughter, now calls for your's ; the circumstances only are different, the objects are the same ; both are innocence and childhood, misfortune and distress ; and, though no tyrant exposes those to perish on the wide waters, whom your care protects ; yet how many of them, it may be feared, would be in as bad, if not a worse condition, were the blessings of charity withheld from them ?

them? Sunk in misery, some, perhaps, might die unpitied and unheard of in solitary anguish, and some, wearied with their distresses, and sick of life, might, in the gloomy madness of despair, rush on their own destruction; while others, tainted with early vices, might abandon themselves to every species of villainy, at length, die an ignominious death, and disgrace that community, to which they might have been at once a CREDIT and SUPPORT.

EMBRACE then the happy occasion, which surely returns not too often, of being charitable with a certainty of being useful. While others run round with giddy delight, in a continual whirl of pleasure; while they indulge themselves in every unmeaning, despicable amusement, and flock, without a blush, to the luxurious banquets of dissipation; may you, at least, while such objects are before you, indulge yourselves in “the luxury of doing good.” Consider that
more

more heart-felt satisfaction attends one single mite that is dedicated to virtue, than all the profusion of wealth that is squandered away in idle ostentation, or fashionable excesses. Here enjoyment is united with duty ; and we never commend ourselves more effectually to the “ Father “ of all mercies,” than when, by our active benevolence, we contribute to the happiness and welfare of our fellow-creatures. These are holy satisfactions that never will desert us. These are pleasures immortal as our intellectual natures are. No power or chance shall ever deprive us of them ; for we are told, “ though tongues “ shall cease, and knowledge shall vanish “ away, yet CHARITY shall never fail.” She will never fail to comfort us, when this world and all its enjoyments begin to fade away. Yes, when the mind, destitute of all other support, but what is derived from religion, and the retrospect of a well-spent life, languishes on the bed of sickness, and looks forward to the certain approach of death ;

death ; “ then shall our prayers and our
“ alms go up for a memorial before God.”

THUS far, I have chiefly appealed to
your reason and your humanity ; permit
me now, as briefly as possible, to urge
the practice of charity to children, on a
more sacred ground, and appeal to you as
Christians.

OUR blessed Lord, on this occasion, as
on most others, has taught us our duty
both by precept and example. He knew
the wants of childhood ; he knew their
helplessness ; and that they could neither re-
commend themselves to notice and support,
by contributing to men’s pleasures or pro-
moting their interests. Innocence is their
claim to protection ; and strong as it is, at
all times, is, notwithstanding, doubly so,
when threatened with danger, or surround-
ed with distress. The Saviour of mankind
knew this ; and though he who had not
where “ to lay his own head,” could
neither minister to them food or raiment,

yet, to manifest his affection for them, he did that which was much better; “he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them,” says the holy evangelist. Still further to make known his love, and to inculcate this divine principle of charity, he recommended them to the kindness of all the world, and that, surely, in the strongest manner, when he told mankind, that “whosoever receiveth one such little child in my name, receiveth me.” Again, he gives us to understand, that even the smallest bounty to children, shall not pass without an ample recompence from heaven; for, says he, in another place, “whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones, a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall, in no wise, lose his reward.” But, would you have the recompence of this heavenly virtue shewn in a still more glorious point of view? Let me rehearse to you part of the grand and solemn scene of the last judgment, as delivered

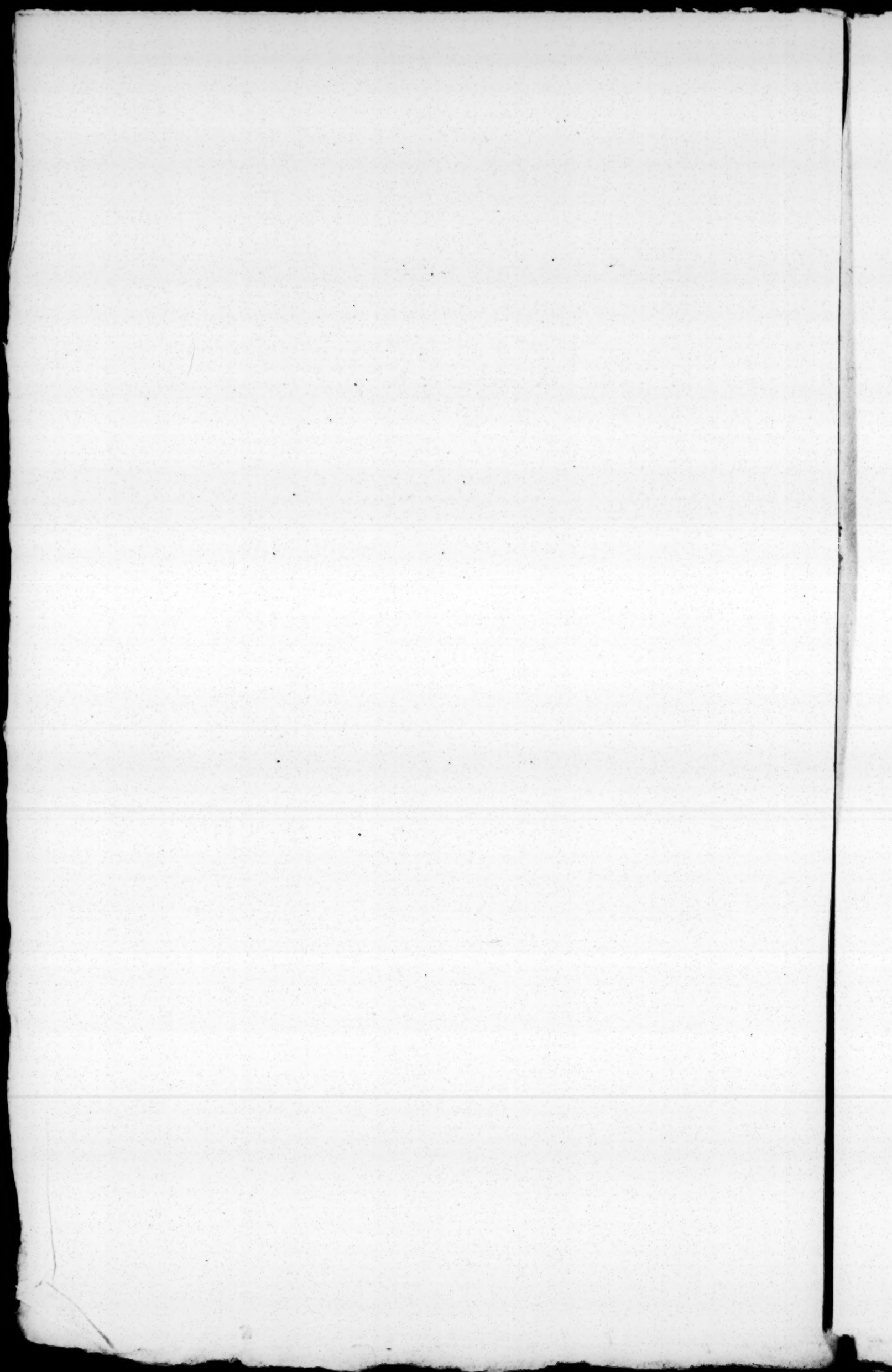
livered to us by the Saviour of the world himself, in the sublimest and most beautiful manner.

“ WHEN,” says he, “ the Son of man
“ shall come in his glory, and all the
“ holy angels with him, then shall he
“ sit upon his throne, and before him
“ shall be gathered all nations; and he
“ shall separate them one from another,
“ as a shepherd divideth his sheep from
“ the goats. Then shall the King say
“ unto them on his right hand, Come,
“ ye blessed of my Father, inherit the
“ kingdom prepared for you from the
“ beginning of the world: For I was
“ an hungered, and ye gave me meat, I
“ was thirsty and ye gave me drink; I
“ was a stranger, and ye took me in;
“ naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick,
“ and ye visited me; I was in prison, and
“ ye came unto me.” Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, “ Lord, when
“ saw we thee an hungered and fed thee?
“ or thirsty, and gave thee drink? when

“ saw we thee a stranger, and took thee
“ in? or naked, and clothed thee? or
“ when saw we thee sick, or in prison,
“ and came unto thee? And the King
“ shall answer and say unto them, Verily
“ I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have
“ done it unto one of the least of these
“ my brethren, ye have done it unto
“ me.”

THIS, then, is the last motive that can be urged to christians; with this, therefore, let me close my discourse. It would be superfluous to multiply arguments; after such a motive they would rather degrade, than exalt the subject; for what appeal, either to the understanding or the heart will be heard, if the Son of God speaks in vain? He has clearly pointed out our duty with all that majestic simplicity, and artless grandeur, which characterize his holy gospel. I have only to hope that our practice, particularly on the present occasion, will correspond with our profession. “ For what doth it profit,
“ my

“ my brethren,” says the apostle James,
“ though a man say he hath faith, and
“ have not works? Can faith save him?
“ If a brother or a sister,” continues he,
“ be naked and destitute of daily food,
“ and one of you say unto them, depart
“ in peace, be ye warmed, and be ye
“ filled; notwithstanding ye give them
“ not the things which are needful to
“ the body; what doth it profit?” Let
us not then be like those, who honored
God with their lips, but whose hearts were
far from him; but let us remember, that
“ faith without works is dead,” and that,
“ if we know these things and do them
“ not, the greater will be our condem-
“ nation.”



S E R M O N VI.

ON THE RESURRECTION.

2 COR. V. 10.

For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

THE resurrection of the body and a future judgment have always been the hope of every good man, and the fear of every bad one. The wicked Felix, we are told, trembled at this awful prospect; while the holy apostle looked forward to it with joy, as to the crown, and consummation of his bliss. There seems to

be something implanted in our nature, independent of what we gather from divine revelation and the exercise of our faculties, which tells us that we shall exist hereafter, and makes us shrink with horror at the thought of annihilation.

SOME of the most eminent of the heathen writers have proved the reasonableness of a future state of rewards and punishments, on the footing of natural reason. Wherever they turned their eyes, to whatever object they directed their enquiries, whether they contemplated the vegetable system, or looked abroad into the animal world, they could trace the marks of infinite wisdom, justice and mercy throughout the great Creator's works. His providential care and protection were seen, as well in the covering that shielded the tender bud from the cold till it had no further need of it, as in the means which the most insignificant reptile was provided with for procuring food, and preserving its species. There appeared no seeming injustice,
but

but what they could reconcile, and they saw no reason to doubt the wisdom, or the goodness of God, when they employed their thoughts on any thing but on the human race. It was there alone that they could perceive disorder, irregularity and confusion. The planets were constant to their courses; the seasons preserved their due change; the plants, the herbs, the flowers appeared and disappeared, bloomed and faded at their stated and appointed seasons. The animal creation, too, were constant to the laws by which they ever had, and, doubtless, ever will be governed. The bird was directed to form her nest of the same materials and at the same time. The bee gathered her honey and framed her comb, without variation or improvement; and the beast, viewed in a state of nature, made no progress towards any perfection, but was governed by fixed and determinate laws, which preserved his conduct invariably the same. All seemed to act together for the preservation of beauty and order; all, but man, were regulated

gulated by the divine providence and rendered subservient to certain laws, from which they could not vary or depart.

THE human race alone were subject to accidental misery, confusion and disorder. But why was this? Because, as they might have rightly concluded, men were endowed with a freedom of acting, and, as free agents, eminently distinguished from the rest of the creation. Instead of being over-ruled or controuled by any supernatural power, they had the God-like faculties of reason and conscience bestowed upon them to regulate their passions and direct their conduct. By the help of these, they were continually making gradual advances towards perfection, and, in proportion as they suffered themselves to be governed by their dictates, they proceeded in moral excellence and social virtue. But the abuse of these excellent gifts by men, who in all ages gave way to the weaknesses of their nature, and forsook the paths of rectitude, frequently produced partial misery, and
debased

debased the human character with vice and meanness, injustice and oppression.

Now, though it could not be believed that an all-wise, all-just, and all-bountiful God, would extend his divine favor to the meanest part of the creation, and withhold it from his noblest creature, man; yet vice was frequently seen to triumph unpunished over virtue, and to trample upon social duty; wickedness was frequently crowned with prosperity, while goodness pined in poverty, and was sometimes exposed to all the miseries of life. This could not be accounted for, or reconciled to the known attributes of the Deity, any otherwise than by looking forward into futurity, and determining that there must be some future period of existence for mankind, in which they would be either miserable or happy, according to their conduct while here. Hence, the language of heathen poetry is, that the virtuous, the pious and the brave inhabit ELYSIUM, and the wicked are tormented in TARTARUS.

BUT

BUT though they could perceive that men ought to be accountable for their actions here, in another world, by the force of natural reason, yet they knew not how this could be. It was too great a mystery for human understanding to investigate or explain ; but, though their reason was inadequate to so great a task, they had modesty and good sense enough not to reject their persuasion on this account ; since they could look abroad into nature and discover many phænomena equally wonderful, and equally beyond their comprehension. The springing of a plant and the formation of animals, were to them, mysteries as great, we might reasonable suppose, as the resurrection of the body ; since they would no sooner have believed the one than the other, if the information of their senses had not convinced them of the latter. The vain and trifling argument, therefore, that this great doctrine is incomprehensible, seems to have had but little weight with the wisest of the heathens, though they probably had no assistance

assistance from divine revelation to direct their enquiries, nor any testimonies from above to settle their opinion. They had knowledge and reason sufficient to make them HOPE it, but they can hardly be said to have had enough to make them BELIEVE it. They could not proceed with any certainty on so mysterious a subject, nor rely upon their own reason, in an affair of such importance, with any safety. We need not wonder, therefore, that numberless superstitions should be admitted by them, through fear of not acting right, and a sense of their own ignorance and incapacity.

VARIOUS, indeed, were the disputes, and various were the systems that were formed, on this grand subject, in most of the known nations of the world. Some believed, some hoped, some scrupled, and some disbelieved. Even the Jews themselves, who had the assistance of the sacred volume to determine their minds, were divided into sects on this important doctrine. The Pharisees, a numerous sect, believed it, and

and the Sadducees, another numerous sect, disbelieved it.

IT was reserved for the blessed Saviour of the world to clear away all this superstition and error, all these doubts and disputes, and to “bring life and immortality to light, through his holy gospel.” He has there disclosed to us, in some measure, the awful truths of that life which is to come, and explained to us the manner of the resurrection. He hath assured us, that all men shall rise again with their bodies at the last day, and receive the final sentence, which dooms them to happiness or misery, according to their works. He has been particular in describing to us this last tremendous judgment, and in presenting to us the joys of heaven, and the torments of the wicked. By this he has added the strongest incitements to virtue, and laid the most effectual restraint upon vice. He has likewise, by this, glorified his heavenly Father in vindicating his divine attributes, and given, besides, such comfort to the poor,
the

the afflicted and unfortunate, as no chance can deprive them of, and no power destroy. The pious too, and the just, the charitable and humane, have now the joy and satisfaction to know, that the reward of all their goodness is not confined to the trifling and uncertain blessings of this world; but that a crown of heavenly glory is prepared for them, which shall never know decay.

BUT this most excellent and most sacred system of moral and religious duty, the holy gospel, has not been, it must be lamented, and is not, at this present time, without its enemies and opposers. Not the excellence of its doctrines, the heavenly example of its ever-sacred Author, nor the unfeigned zeal and sufferings of all its first professors, can gain it universal credit, or procure it general reverence. Many have been misled by vanity or by pride; some have been deluded by mere "scoffers at the word of God;" by men, who have endeavoured to make others laugh at every thing

thing that is sacred, and who have either ignorantly, or wilfully, misconstrued texts of scripture to make out contradiction; while others have been driven into infidelity by their fears. Nor is this strange. He that never knew the exalted satisfactions of piety, that finds no consolation from the exercise of christian virtues, but, on the contrary, is often haunted with the remembrance of guilt; he who can enjoy no pleasure, but in the indulgence of appetites which he knows to be vicious, and no satisfaction but what a life of profaneness and impiety affords, can have little prospect of happiness from a system, whose first object is to purify the heart from sin, to promote the great duties of social life, and enforce the constant reverence of the Deity. How happy will he be then to embrace any persuasion that frees him from these restraints! How gladly will he subscribe to that creed, which curtails him of no vicious pleasure, which lays upon him no injunctions that he fears to violate, and banishes from his mind all the
terrors

terrors of a future judgment ! Every mean equivocation, and every wretched sophistry, to him will wear the appearance of argument and truth, and carry with it conviction. Men there are of this description, who, when they have convinced themselves, as they vainly hope, and perhaps believe, are not content to keep their wretched and deplorable persuasions to themselves, but are continually attempting to justify their conduct, and scattering doubts in the minds of others ; the young, the ignorant and profligate, generally are their prey. But there can be no great merit in overcoming those, who, if they can make any resistance, are not disposed to do it ; nor can it afford much gratification, one should think, to their darling passion, their vanity, thus to destroy in others the greatest motives to goodness, and set them free from all restraints of fear ; since they might convince themselves, if they would, that the weaknesses of human nature will always contribute much more to the propagation

of infidelity than any arguments which its professors can advance.

BUT the christian religion hath now been so long and peaceably established among us, that men have carelessly and contentedly embraced it, without examining into the evidence of its doctrines, or knowing the grounds on which they have believed them. Many, therefore, it must be lamented, have never been able to answer the common despicable objections of vain and wicked men; or support that faith which they have been taught to profess. Hence, it is become necessary, in some measure, for the teachers of the holy gospel, to lay the foundations of christianity afresh. The great doctrines of our holy religion are not to be defended against the cavils of artful infidels by those who have read the holy scriptures with little or no attention, nor can the evidence of them be grounded, in sceptical minds, but by a diligent and careful examination of
circum-

circumstances as they relate to one another; by arguing from known and acknowledged facts, and considering them as they are connected with others, and have reference to those persons who were concerned in them.

HAVING therefore already given you the reasons that made the ancients, from the light of nature, expect a future state, I shall now consider the testimonies which we have in the New Testament for the belief of this great doctrine, and argue from some very peculiar and providential circumstances that attend them. By these means we shall see that our faith rests on a foundation so firm, that, in my opinion, no argument can shake it.

IN the mean time, let us remember, that of all the revelations made to man, the resurrection of the body is by far the most important to our happiness. On this the purest of religions is built, and on this the rewards and punishments

of eternity are suspended. We need no other argument therefore, surely, to give it our most serious and attentive consideration, particularly at this solemn season *, when the Saviour of the world vanquished the power of death, “ opened the gates of “ everlasting life, and became the first-fruits “ of them that slept.” Let us then proceed to examine the evidence of the holy gospel.

It is well known that our blessed Lord preached the resurrection of the body during his life-time. The prospect of another world, too, was all the consolation that his faithful followers had, after his death, for the distresses and calamities which they were to suffer in this. He was so very particular and circumstantial on this important subject, that he publicly foretold the exact time in which he was to rise from the dead. The Jews, ever eager to disprove any of our Saviour’s doctrines, thought they had now an opportunity of

* Preached on Easter-day.

subverting the very foundation of christianity, by disproving the great doctrine on which it was built. Therefore, St. Matthew tells us, that the “ chief Priests
“ and Pharisees came together unto Pi-
“ late,” after the crucifixion, “ saying,
“ Sir, we remember that that deceiver said
“ while he was yet alive, After three days
“ I will rise again : Command, therefore,
“ that the sepulchre be made sure until the
“ third day, lest his disciples come by night,
“ and steal him away, and say unto the peo-
“ ple, He is risen from the dead ; so the last
“ error shall be worse than the first. Pilate
“ said unto them, ye have a watch, go your
“ way, make it as sure as you can. So
“ they went and made the sepulchre sure,
“ sealing the stone, and setting a watch.”

Here you perceive every precaution was used to convince the disciples of their error. They rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre ; they sealed it, that they might know if the tomb had been opened ; and, that the hopes of his followers might be finally disappointed, they sent a detachment

of soldiers to guard it. But all this, instead of subverting their faith, and putting a stop to the further progress of christianity, served to confirm it in the most eminent manner, as we shall soon perceive. For, when the Jews had taken all this care, and had been so very diligent and anxious to prevent the delusion, as they thought, from spreading any further among the people, how easily would it have been effected, if, after the time appointed, which was only three days, they could have publicly exhibited the pale and lifeless corpse, which they had scourged and crucified, and while hanging on the cross, had pierced to the heart! When all Judea was in an uproar, and these same chief priests trembled for fear of losing the dignity and profit of their exalted station, why did not they produce to his beloved disciples this spectacle of horror? This was undoubtedly their intention in guarding the sepulchre; and this would, at once, have destroyed the whole system, and silenced its professors for ever; but this they could
not

not do. For, early on the first day of the week (the very day on which he had foretold he should rise) we are informed there was a great earthquake; an angel, whose countenance was like lightning, and whose garment was white as snow, rolled back the stone and sat upon it; the keepers shook for fear, and Jesus rose and departed.

WHEN the guards, struck with terror and amazement, told the chief priests what had happened, how truly despicable and how dreadfully guilty was their conduct on this occasion! Ever deaf to conviction and obstinate in error, though in matters that concerned their eternal salvation, they bribed the soldiers largely to say, that while they fell asleep his disciples came by night and stole him away. Though, according to their own confession, they were asleep, yet they could positively affirm who they were that removed the body! A memorable instance of the inconsistency of falsehood, and the mean-

ness of guilt. Thus defeated in their eager expectations, and now conscious of their inhuman cruelty, they could descend to every mean, contemptible subterfuge, to justify their conduct and silence the clamors of the people.

BUT I am aware that there are some men who have so far imposed upon themselves, or have been misled by others, as not to be satisfied with the testimony of the Evangelists on this head. Let us then suppose it really true, that his disciples did steal him away by night. We can meet them on the ground of Judaism and infidelity, and, by arguing on the subject, as they themselves represent it, we shall still be able to vindicate our belief against all the artifices of vanity, and stratagems of guilt.

THE premise on which we must proceed in this affair, and which cannot be denied, is, that our Saviour's disciples, if they stole the body from the tomb, must know, that their blessed master (let it even
be

be supposed with reverence) told them and all the world a falsehood, when he preached to them the resurrection of his body. They must know that he had deceived them in a point, which was to them of all others, the most important ; since the promise of the resurrection was what they chiefly relied on, as the reward of all their labors, their sufferings and calamities. “ If, says St. Paul, in this life only “ we have hope in Christ, we are of all “ men most miserable.” The resurrection of the body and a future judgment were the principal foundation of their faith ; for, says the same venerable apostle, “ if “ Christ be not risen, then is our preach- “ ing vain, and your faith is also vain.” If they had been disappointed, therefore, in this particular, the system would certainly have fallen to the ground : but on the contrary, we find they preached it with unremitting firmness, constancy and resolution ; they submitted to the greatest hardships, they endured the severest afflictions for the sake of this fundamental article of
their

their creed, and at last, to shew the whole world that they preached it with the fullest conviction, they died martyrs to it, and sealed the truth of their profession with their blood.

Now, that men should suffer death, rather than relinquish a belief which they had firmly persuaded themselves was true, is very probable. The histories of all nations, indeed, will afford us many examples of poor and wretched enthusiasts who have fallen victims to an ill-founded zeal and local superstitions ; we must not forget, however, that these superstitions had been handed down to them, with the greatest reverence, from their forefathers, and that they had been taught to embrace them, from their infancy, as sacred and undoubted TRUTHS. But, that a whole body of men would willingly expose themselves to the most imminent dangers and calamities, and, at last, suffer the most cruel deaths for the sake of supporting a doctrine which they must know to be FALSE (and in this predicament

ment were all the apostles, if they stole the body from the tomb) is not only past credit, but is what has never been heard of. It is contrary to all reason, and repugnant to human nature.

WHAT objections more have we to answer? Will any antichristian be bold and desperate enough to ascribe their conduct to interested motives? Will they assert that riches and honors were their object? Alas! all the world knows they lived in poverty, and that both these were contradictory to that religion which they professed with such zeal and constancy. Will they affirm that a desire of fame, and a wish to raise themselves into popular favor, were their motives? They were men by no means addicted to ambition or to pride. They preached humility; and their history informs us, that their profession exposed them to all kinds of disgrace, and instead of procuring them the comforts, brought on them all the ills of life. Besides, had ambition, or the desire of this world's honor, been the principle that

that governed their conduct, they never would have embraced that religion, which of all others, most strongly condemns it ; that religion which none of its enemies have ever dared to charge with being interwoven with the schemes of policy, or contaminated with worldly pursuits. But I think the purity of their morals, and the innocence of their lives, are alone sufficient to gain them the credit of every man, who is not misled by vanity, or imposed upon by fear.

THERE are however many more circumstances, in the accounts of the holy apostles, which will serve to strengthen and confirm this great doctrine of Christ's resurrection ; but what has been said, perhaps, might be sufficient, since the testimonies which I have confined myself to are chiefly such as are furnished by the enemies of christianity. I cannot, however, forbear mentioning one more, which we have from the venerable Saint Paul, who, though he was bred a Pharisee, and that in the strictest manner, from having

been a persecutor and blasphemer, became not only a convert, but an apostle of Christ. He was a man of the first learning, and of some consequence in the Jewish nation; but after his miraculous conversion he forsook all; kindred, parents, fortune and country, for the sake of Jesus; no difficulties or dangers could suppress his active zeal, and no distresses could prevent him from preaching the gospel to all nations. He will be ever considered as a strong pillar of the christian church. He has elucidated his blessed Master's precepts, and enforced his sacred doctrines, with the greatest eloquence and learning, in those excellent epistles which have been transmitted to us. There too we have a confirmation of the resurrection of the dead; he told the Corinthians, that our Saviour was seen of above five hundred of the brethren at once, of whom, continued he, the greater part remain unto this present. And, let it be observed, in answer to those who ask why our Lord appeared not to others as well as to his own disciples,

disciples, that we have no reason to believe that these men were brethren of the christian church at the time they saw our Lord. St. Paul only affirms that they were brethren at the time of his writing that epistle to the Corinthians, (which was many years after the resurrection) and most probably they owed their conversion to the ocular demonstration with which they were favored. Here then we perceive, that it was in the power of the greater part of five hundred men to contradict this assertion of St. Paul, at the time he made it. To suppose that so great a number would conspire together to support a falsehood, when there could be no motive for doing it, either from interest or from fear, is to suppose that men would yield to guilt without temptation, and become abandoned without reward.

SATISFIED, then, of the truth of this great doctrine, we must remember, that it was taught by the Saviour of the world to deter men from all vice, and establish them in all virtue ; to medicate the ills of
human

human life, to comfort and support the innocent, to terrify the guilty, and “ to
“ justify the ways God to man.”

LET it then have its due influence on our minds, by keeping us in the constant practice of virtue, and the unwearied exercise of every social and religious duty. Whenever we might be tempted by our passions, our vanity, or pride, to deviate from that line of conduct which our own hearts approve, let us resist the solicitation of every groveling appetite, by remembering, that “ we must all appear before the
“ judgment-seat of Christ, that every one
“ may receive the things done in his body,
“ according to that he hath done, whether
“ it be good or bad ;” before that sacred Judge who acted up to the perfection of human nature, and who cannot be supposed to pardon the neglect of those duties which he died to establish ; “ knowing,
“ therefore, the terrors of the Lord, let
“ us be persuaded.”



S E R M O N VII.

ON THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL.

I C O R. XV. 35, 36.

But some man will say, How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?

Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die.

THE Holy Apostle, in this grand chapter, enforces and explains the resurrection of the body in the sublimest strains of inspired eloquence. He condescends to anticipate the natural objection of unbelievers, in the words of the text, and with great propriety refers them to that analogous proof which the course of nature

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affords.

affords. Having already given you some of the many striking, and, I think, unanswerable reasons which the gospel dispensation, and the partial distribution of good and evil in this world afford of this awful event, our time may be profitably spent, in pursuing the argument which St. Paul has furnished us with, and considering how far the light of nature tends to confirm the promises of our Lord, and what the general plan of providence, as far as we can trace its dispensations, teaches us to expect.

MAN is a compound being, consisting of soul and body. The former we deem our spiritual part, the latter we are assured is material. The objection that we know not what spirit is, carries with it no force, as it may be applied with equal propriety to the essence of every substance in nature. It is sufficient that we are conscious of its existence, and that we understand by it something as remote from matter, as fire is from earth. Nothing can be more unreasonable,

reasonable, or more repugnant to common sense, than the endeavour of some modern philosophers to reduce the soul of man to the laws of matter ; however the doctrine of materialism may be softened by the supposition of curious organization, nice arrangement, and mysterious contrivances.

WE form our ideas and judge of every thing around us by certain properties which distinguish them from others. Ask the philosopher why he classes every object in nature under the general definition of matter, he will answer, because he can apply to them divisibility, form, extension, attraction, and other properties common to bodies in general. But not one of these can be applied to the mind or soul of man. We cannot, for instance, give it the universal property of form. It would be absurd, in the highest degree, to suppose it round, or square, or of any other figure. Nor can we limit it to any certain boundaries of space ; its volitions, if not self-determined, often originate from too mysterious a source

for investigation, and its thoughts are so rapid, that the lightning which darts from heaven to earth, is but a feeble illustration of their celerity. It admits the ideas of things and persons existing at the distance of ten, or fifty thousand miles as readily, and with as little exertion, as those which are under the immediate observation of the senses. So eminently distinguished, therefore, by these, and many other attributes, is the soul from mere matter, that to confound them, seems, if we may judge from the knowledge we have of it, as absurd as to argue that motion and space are the same; or that the properties, which are common to heavy bodies, may be applied to thought.

Much stress has been laid on a mere supposition of a great philosopher, indeed, that omnipotence COULD endow matter with a thinking faculty. To talk of possibilities, with regard to the Deity, is talking of what we know nothing about. To limit omnipotence is evidently to destroy the very idea
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of it. It is our humble lot to “know only
“in part,” to “see as through a glass
“darkly ;” to govern our lives by those
gracious assistances which the Almighty
Father hath afforded us, and where cer-
tainty is not to be obtained, to act with
experience and probability in our favor.
Taking it for granted then, as I do not
wish to lead you into the unprofitable dis-
cussion of metaphysical subtilties, that the
soul of man is something distinct from his
body, let us fairly consider, how far it is
probable, from the nature of things, that
we shall exist hereafter, when the body is
destroyed, or dissolved by death.

THE Deity hath been graciously pleased
to scatter throughout the creation innu-
merable objects that teach us many useful
truths, and many important duties of life.
The ant and bee have long been considered
as emblems of laudable industry and pro-
vident wisdom. The succession of the
four seasons mark, with peculiar beauty,
the different stages of life. The bud that

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blossoms,

bloffoms, the fruit that ripens, and the leaf that drops and withers away, bids us also look forward to that period when our frail tenement, according to the invariable law of nature, shall moulder into dust. The analogy of the animal and vegetable world seems likewise to point out a future state of existence, and clears the mysterious subject of the resurrection from many of its supposed difficulties. The seed which is buried in the ground is endowed with a vital principle, which exists and springs up into life, as the Apostle observed, when the bulk and external appearance is dissolved. The subject is familiarized to us through the works of God. We are accustomed to see different animals and insects of the earth pass through various modes of existence. The bird bursts the shell, and enjoys a life as distinct from its former, as can well be imagined; the sluggish worm that crawls upon the earth, after passing through a temporary death, to all appearance, becomes a fly, and roves at large through
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the expanse of heaven. Even we ourselves have existed for a short period before our birth, when, as well as during the helpless state of infancy, we could form no notion or expectation of the present enlarged mode of being we experience, nor have the least consciousness of the improved state of all our faculties.

THUS far, then, we can perceive there is nothing inconsistent, but, on the contrary, highly analogous to the general plan of nature, in the supposition that we shall exist after death. The present life appears only another stage of existence; a field of difficulty, danger and trial to prove our merits; and prepare us for a more durable state. This view of things, but faintly shadowed out, indeed, in the contemplation of the works of nature, will receive additional light from an attentive consideration of the soul itself, its faculties, its satisfactions, its wishes and pursuits.

IN sleep, when the senses are locked up, and the body is in a state of forgetfulness, the soul wanders through worlds of her own creating; sees things and persons without the eye's assistance; admits ideas of pleasure and of pain, with all the liveliness and force of reality; reflects on them, and draws conclusions from them.

WITH regard to the objection of those who, in maintaining their favorite system, seem happy to observe a something similar in animals, it appears to me frivolous and impertinent. Let it be granted that the creatures of the earth may be endowed with intellect sufficient to answer the purposes of their existence. What then?—Do they expect that we should tell them, on philosophical principles, what becomes of it after death? or that we can precisely shew how it differs in its nature and its essence from the faculties of human beings? No; to the doubts and difficulties of scepticism there is no end. It is sufficient that the Scriptures have told us, the brutes perish, and

and that man shall live for ever. It is surely a further satisfaction that reason, revelation and nature, have drawn the line of distinction between us, manifest enough in general, though we cannot always mark its progress with metaphysical accuracy, nor exactly determine where the first faint traces begin, or where they vanish. But is not this the case in almost every object of human enquiry? The Temple of Science might be said to rest on secret foundations, and its pinnacles are for ever encircled with impenetrable mists. The middle therefore, is the only part that appears luminous to man.

THE present question, however, like most others that lie beyond the reach of human understanding, will be found to regard us no farther than as an object of idle curiosity; and every wise man will leave it among the innumerable mysteries and secret dispensations of that Almighty Being “who maketh darkness his pavilion, and rideth on the wings of the wind!”

HOWEVER

HOWEVER mysterious, in some respects, the union of that divine principle, the soul, may be with the body, we do not find that the loss of one, two, or more limbs, can destroy, or impair its faculties. We have, indeed, instances of men producing the most vigorous proofs of genius and mental perfection, when the body has been wasted with disease, and sinking by sure and gradual decay into the grave. Many also, to the very moment of their departure from the world, retain their mental powers in full perfection. In addition to these remarks let it be remembered, that one of the greatest mathematicians this country has to boast of was blind from his infancy ; and the poet eminently distinguished for uniting the brilliancy of fancy with the most perfect elegance and refined taste, passed his whole life in a state of corporal weakness, disease and pain. It is by no means probable, therefore, that the soul, whose existence seems, in many cases, to be so independent of the body, should be annihilated by death. It is contrary to the direct course

course of nature. Were they so intimately combined, were the law of their union so strict, that what dissolves the one, must necessarily dissolve the other, we should invariably see them decay together, and approach the period of their dissolution by a regular and uniform progress. Experience teaches us that when the trunk begins to die away, the branches also die with it, the leaves drop, and the blossoms fade.

FARTHER, it must be particularly observed, that for many reasons, the short period of human life seems by no means adequate, or proper boundaries for the soul's existence. Most of the objects in nature have their proper and distinct uses assigned them. Beyond these they answer no end, apparent to us, nor is it necessary that they should. The plant springs up, yields its seed, and dies. The brute arrives at a point of perfection, beyond which he would never pass, were his existence protracted to the end of time. Besides the appetites of hunger and thirst, which are necessary

cessary to support his being, and those instincts by which the species is continued, he feels no other wants from nature, performs the task imposed on him by man, and dies. Nothing of this holds true with regard to the human soul. This world admits of no point of perfection where it must be at a stand, or beyond which it cannot pass. The memory is still open to admit ideas that have sufficient novelty, judgment will combine them with infinite variety, and the imagination is ever ready to soar beyond the reach of our senses, and the limits of sublunary nature.

OF the endless diversity of characters that croud the universe, pitch upon which ever you please, and you will find, upon enquiry, that this world affords him no settled point of rest, beyond which he does not aspire. There is no rank, or station, in which all his wishes can be completely gratified, and the end of his being fully answered. The ambitious man finds his views enlarged, in proportion as his predominant passion is gratified ;

gratified ; and Alexander, after he had subdued, with his military barbarians, the whole human race, as he vainly thought, sighed that there were no more worlds for him to conquer. With the pious man, all around him is vanity, when compared with the glorious objects in view. “ He runs, indeed, the race that is set before him,” but “ presses on towards the mark,” and sighs for the rewards of immortality.

EVEN the more moderate, those whose wishes and pursuits are confined within narrower limits, and who think that when they have acquired the comforts of life, they could be content to pass the remainder of their days in peace and tranquility, in the satisfactions of friendship, the exercise of benevolence, and the innocent indulgence of rational pursuits ; even THEY always find their schemes of felicity imperfect, and their enjoyments often disturbed. The soul either wishes, after short experience, to shew its good-will to man in a larger sphere, or sighs for longer time to execute
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some favorite plans of action, and to see their happy effects. Sometimes death interferes also, takes from us those whose friendship, whose virtues and endearments formed the basis of our happiness, and bids us look abroad for new objects of hope and satisfaction.

THE votary of science, after studious and minute researches into the laws of nature, and the infinite variety of her works, sees the prospect widen as he proceeds ; on his journies, with fresh delight, as he discovers new beauty, new relations, and a more regular order of things arise ; but complains that he is forced away just as he has taken an imperfect glance. The student who wishes to follow the operations of providence in the moral government of the world, who longs to trace the mazes of passion, become acquainted with his own heart, and reconciled to the lot of humanity ; has only sufficient time to settle his habits of thought and principles of action, to admire the greatness, the goodness and wisdom of his divine
Creator,

Creator, before he quits the scene for ever. With every human being there is always something wanting here ; something more durable ; something higher, something less subject to accident, and more excellent in its nature.

HENCE, then, originates the thought, the wish and expectation of immortality. And can we think this all delusion ? Would a good and gracious God disclose sources of superior happiness to us, just let us sip of them while adulterated with the bitter cup of misery and the impure alloy of mortality, and then withdraw them from our lips for ever ! It cannot be. It seems a point in which not only his goodness and wisdom, but even his truth and justice are concerned. Would he send a spirit endowed with such capacities of pleasure, virtue and improvement to hover over the earth, for a short period, like an ignis fatuus, and then extinguish it for ever ! Impossible. If we may ascribe any degree of satisfaction to the everlasting Father, arising
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from the creation of Man, it can be attributed to no cause so worthy, as that of viewing a human soul under the dispensation of his providence, advancing through trials, difficulties and dangers towards the perfection of its nature ; till at length, by subduing temptation, passing through the needful discipline of life, and fulfilling the measure of obedience required, it becomes worthy to associate with angels, and to be admitted into the presence of its Creator.

LET it be further remarked, in confirmation of the soul's immortality, that throughout the whole universe of being, we have not an instance, even in the material world, of annihilation presented to our observation. We know not what it is in any thing. It is only a term adapted, like many others, to the imperfection of human knowledge. The most perfect dissolution that the operations of nature and the effects of art discover to us, only produces a change, or mutation of being. The fuel we burn, for instance, is partly
reduced

reduced to ashes, and the fumes that ascend into the air, though wafted through the atmosphere by the winds, are condensed into vapor, which soon returns, and still continues its agency in tempering the elements with salutary moisture, and nourishing the fruits of the earth.

As it appears, therefore, that no cause in nature is sufficient to produce the destruction of any material substance whatever, can we with any probability, or any analogy to the plan of providence by which this world is governed, suppose, for a moment, that the dissolution of our mere material frame should finally destroy the soul? Can we indulge a thought that the spirit placed within us, which has none of the properties that render matter subject, if not to absolute decay, yet to infinite divisibility and change, should ever lose its consciousness and powers of thought? Its volition and reflection? Its hopes and fears, its sense of pleasure and of pain? There is

nothing like argument to support so gloomy a persuasion.

THESE then are some of the many scattered lights, which, when collected together, seem to afford us sufficient reason to expect, that this life is only the dawn of our being. The feeble rays which gleam around us from afar, shine with increasing lustre, as we dwell on them with stedfast attention, and evidently promise a brighter day.

THIS glorious truth our blessed Lord and Saviour has firmly established, by “ bringing life and immortality to light through his holy gospel.” He knew that this grand and awful doctrine, rested, before his coming into the world, on too weak a foundation. The ignorant and wretched might, indeed, occasionally have indulged a wavering hope of immortality; but it required the steady thought and calm meditation of the philosopher to penetrate the shades of futurity, and look forward, with

with any certainty, to that final state of retribution, in which every one shall be rewarded or punished according to his works.

To extend this blessed truth, therefore, to all mankind, to render it a principle of practical virtue, piety, benevolence and truth, was one great object of our Lord's mission. He has confirmed it by his own resurrection, and pointed out the means of rendering it a crown of glory to us, that shall never fade away. The means are what might naturally be expected for the occasion; the exercise of the soul in goodness, and every duty that regards ourselves, our neighbour, or the Deity. We are therefore commanded, as the fundamental duties of life, to love one another, to submit with humility under the dispensations of providence, "to run the race" that is set before us, however arduous; "to do justice, love mercy, and walk" humbly with our God."

To influence the heart with devout love, and to dispose the soul with willing obedience, to perform the duties that are required of us, the evidence of nature and of reason, joined to the divine illumination of the gospel, must be deemed fully sufficient for every honest enquirer. Those feeble lights which, like the distant stars, but faintly glimmered on the naked eye, appear, through the glorious revelation of Christ, like the planets moving in their respective orbits, as discovered by the telescopes of art. But as I have fully enlarged on the wonderful testimonies which the gospel affords of our resurrection, in the preceding discourse, I shall not dwell on them any longer here. Permit me only to observe, that the sublime doctrine of the soul's immortality sets human nature in the grandest and most dignified point of view. It leads us through the paths of virtue and religion, to the society of angels and the exalted happiness of heaven. It applies, with equal force, to every principle that is capable of attaching the
heart

heart to virtue, and deterring it from vice. Our hope of reward and fear of punishment, our pride, our sense of shame, our desire of exaltation, and our dread of infamy, all are forcibly impressed and actuated by this awful expectation of a life to come. Consider, then, is the gratification of a few sordid appetites, and that but for a short time, or the indulgence of vicious pleasures, which must quickly die away, a sufficient recompence for degrading ourselves in the eyes of God, and disqualifying our souls for an abode among the spirits of those just men who are made perfect? Surely not. Nothing can possibly be a sufficient atonement for the loss, or even abasement of that divine principle, by which we are exalted far above the brutes, and allied to the seraphim of heaven. Our Lord, therefore, with great propriety may ask "what shall it profit a man, though
" he gain the whole world, and lose his
" own soul?"

MAY we duly attend to these exalted truths and serious considerations, and “work out our salvation with fear and trembling.” Let us, instead of indulging groveling appetites and low desires, learn above all things, “to hunger and thirst after righteousness,” fully persuaded, “that the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.”

S E R M O N V I I I .

ON CHRISTIAN HUMILITY.

LUKE xviii. 10, 11, 12, 13.

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a Publican.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican.

I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

And the Publican standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

NO virtue is more strongly recommended in the holy gospel than humility. Our blessed Lord, in order to

enforce his new commandment, " Love
" one another," and his precepts in general, endeavoured to impress mankind with the mutual wants and distresses of every human being. He never failed to remind them that they were all children of the same Father, and that the time of their sojourning here would be but short. To such, therefore, as gloried too much in the vain distinctions which this world afforded, he inculcated, with peculiar energy, the dangerous uncertainty of riches, and wished to humble their pride, by explaining the inevitable laws to which all flesh is subject.

BEFORE he came to enlighten our minds, " with that wisdom which is from above," the becoming doctrine of humility was but little known. Yet in this uncertain state of things, where a moment gives, and a moment takes away; where no vigilance can guard us from danger, and no prudence can ensure success; " where the race
" is not to the swift, nor the battle to the
" strong,

“ strong, but where time and chance hap-
peneth to us all ;” what can so eminently adorn the human character, as the meek and quiet spirit that breathes through the gospel? Unless humility preside over the heart of man, few are the virtues we can practise, that will not be distrusted by the world. He who cannot humble himself to the level of humanity, and duly reflect on the conditions by which every worldly blessing is enjoyed, will seldom attend to the calls of duty, but with a view to raise his own importance, to promote his interest, or gratify his pride. He will not be one of those modest and sincere christians, who let not their left hand know what their right hand doeth ; but should he ever give alms, will be apt to sound his trumpet before him in the streets. When, too, he is engaged in the discharge of devotional duties, unless this heavenly virtue influence his mind, what will his prayers avail him with that Almighty Being, who regards the “ fighting
“ only of an humble and a contrite heart ?”

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ADD to this, that his sincerity will be often called in question, and his piety imputed, not without cause, to some unworthy motive. The necessary adjuncts of true penitence and prayer, we all know, are a due sense of neglected duty and of human frailty, together with meekness, becoming sorrow, and, above all things, self-humiliation : but these are graces of the Christian character which are very unlikely to prevail in any bosom but that of the humble man. For this reason the contrary dispositions, such as vanity, pride, and self-exaltation, contaminate religion as well as virtue ; but humility ennobles both, and might be considered as the great foundation of that supreme excellence in morals, which distinguishes the holy gospel.

THE Saviour of the world hath taught it us, in the most beautiful manner, both by precept and example ; and if you wish to know its efficacy in the Master as well as the disciple, you will remember that, when he wished to gain the attention of

his followers, and win their hearts to his doctrines, these were the sincere and affectionate words which he used ; “ Come,” said he, “ and learn of me, for I am meek “ and lowly of heart.” I do not appear before you proud in the acquisitions of science and wise in the mysteries ; but am come to teach you the common duties of humanity, and inform you, by my actions, that we should do unto others as we would that they should do unto us. I do not mean to keep you at a distance by the moroseness of philosophy, or the haughtiness of learning ; but with a meek and lowly spirit will receive you as brethren, and lead you to the true knowledge of that gracious Being, who is the Father of us all.

SUCH is the importance, and such is the excellence of humility in general. Suffer me now to recommend it more particularly to your notice, by discoursing on the beautiful parable in the text. A little meditation will discover to us how much the pride of the boasting Pharisee tarnishes the
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pure character of a Christian, and how much the humble penitence of the retired Publican exalts it.

OUR Lord addressed this short story, it seems, to “certain men who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.” In order to expose the conduct of such persons to the censure of the world, he hath introduced a Pharisee opening his mouth, in prayer to the Almighty, with the most uncharitable opinion of his fellow-creatures. He thanks God that he is not like other men, whom he condemns as extortioners, unjust, and adulterers. Then, instead of making any supplication for pardon, or intercession for mercy, he proceeds to enumerate his good works; which were, that he fasted twice in a week, and gave tithes of all that he possessed.

THE first thing that merits reproach in the conduct of this proud, presumptuous Pharisee, is the mean and illiberal spirit which
which

which governed his mind. He could claim no merit to himself; you perceive, without casting malignity of censure upon the whole world. His chief pretensions to virtue, even if we believe his own account, were only exemption from injustice, extortion and adultery. From the two first he might have been deterred by fear of legal punishment, or the loss of reputation in the world; and, as for the last, it was only pleading not guilty, to a crime which the Jewish law punished with the most cruel death. Ostentatious as he was, and willing at all times to dwell on his own deserts, we hear of no practical duties which he constantly fulfilled, no actions of charity, no marks of a benevolent mind, and no instances of friendship. He seems to have separated himself from the whole world, and thought that he stood alone on the summit of human excellence, only because he fasted, regularly, I suppose, twice in a week, and gave tithes of all that he possessed. Whereas the first of these boasted performances was
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more a ritual observance than any essential act of piety, and the other merely a submission to a law of the church which he could not by any means evade. Such were the claims of a man to divine favor, who went up to the holy temple to thank God for his own merits.

BUT is this imaginary Pharisee the only person who harbours such principles, and pursues such a line of conduct, both in his social and religious duty? By no means, I fear. To shew how these haughty dispositions at first originate, and how they impede the progress of virtue in all ages, let us not confine the scene to Judea, nor our contemplations to the sect of Pharisees, men whom our blessed Lord so often reproved for pride, hypocrisy and outward shew; but, to make this divine lesson profitable to us, let us cast our eyes on the present world, observe the men with whom we live, and mark their manners. We shall find many a wretch, like the Pharisee in the text, ground his pretensions to virtue,

tue, not so much on his own deserts, as on the wickedness of his neighbours. Many will, with the utmost contrition and seeming remorse, level their abuse at others, whose only object is to aggrandize themselves; and neglect the exercise of every relative duty, from a persuasion that the world is undeserving of it; for tinged with the dark hues of pride, self-love and enmity, the mind will form such gloomy pictures of human nature, as tend to excite abhorrence of mankind, instead of cherishing that neighbourly love, to which a good man attributes the principal comforts and enjoyments of life.

I CANNOT in this place forbear animadverting, with charity and candor, I hope, on the practice of many moral and religious teachers. They would inculcate the great duties of life, and adorn the religion of Christ, by recommending the love of man. They wish to enforce every moral obligation, and strive to win us to the practice of every virtue; but then they will often give such representations of the world

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at large, and such views of human affairs, as must tend to make us weary, sick and unhappy under the dispensations of providence, rather than chearful, submissive, and contented. Instruction administered to us in this ungracious form, is so far from promoting the love of virtue in an intellectual being, that it serves, in my opinion, most effectually to repress the exercise of it, and to extinguish every charitable and benevolent principle in man.

IN order to excite our love and kindness, we must point out objects that merit it. But would you be inclined to repose the confidence of friendship in any bosom, if you were taught to believe that the world is full of falshood, treachery and hypocrisy? Is it the way to make us love our neighbour, to tell us that all men are selfish and ungrateful? Would the heart ever glow with charity, or melt into tears of tenderness, if all distress was believed to be the counterfeit of knavery, or the merited effects of vice and folly? Nature revolts at
it.

it. Such modes of instruction might suit the wild phrenzy of a gloomy enthusiast, or the moping, melancholy spirit of superstition ; but can never promote the duties of society, or be thought of with any satisfaction, but by those, who conscious of no real worth in their own bosom, seek refuge from reproof in the enormities of the world, and, like the boasting Pharisee, rest happy and contented, because they are not extortioners, knaves and adulterers.

BUT in every concern of life, we are in danger of extremes. We cannot search after the Golden Mean with too much diligence and solicitude. In every case where the duties of society, or the cause of religion is concerned, we cannot be too anxious in our enquiry ; for the fields of active virtue border on the confines of vice ; and no sooner do we quit the regions of prudence and of wisdom, than we enter the wilderness of folly, and the labyrinths of error. To represent men better than they are, is to lay a snare for unsuspecting inno-

cence, and to make the goodness and virtue of one part of the world dupes to the vice and dissimulation of the rest. It is only sowing the seeds of future mortification and disappointment, which in weak minds often terminate in misery, or the continued horrors of a mind sickened with disgust, and at enmity with the whole world.

ON the other hand, to represent men worse than they really are, is to lay the axe to the root of all virtue. It can do no good, but may do much evil. It tends to destroy that confidence between men which is the cement of society, and without which, every friendly and benevolent action would be traced to a vicious, rather than a virtuous principle. It affords a pretext for the guilty, for the proud, and the mean wretch, who rests contented with being negatively good. It increases the moroseness of old age, and adds, perhaps, malignity to ill-nature. The bulk of mankind, too, who for the most
part

part will be occasionally good, would from such a pernicious persuasion become indifferent to virtue, deaf to the calls of pity, and uniformly selfish and unfeeling. What is worse than all, the few benevolent characters that adorn human nature, would learn to fear the attacks of vice and dissimulation from every quarter, and suspicion would soon chill that social affection, on which the chief good and happiness of this present life depend.

THE Pharisee would never have made his fasting twice in a week, and paying tithes of all that he possessed, a subject of proud and arrogant boasting in the temple of God, unless he had first entertained a very unfavorable opinion of his fellow-creatures. He never would have found sufficient cause for self-exaltation in his own mind, if he had not thought all mankind stigmatized with crimes of the most atrocious nature; some extortioners, some knaves, and some adulterers. On the other hand, the meek and humble pub-

lican would not have retired and smitten his bosom in that penitential manner, if he had not entered the temple with a mind overawed by reverence, and a heart deeply impressed with a sense of his own frailties. He would not have cried, in the fervor of devotion, "God be merciful to me a sinner," if he had not entertained a better opinion of the world than the presumptuous Pharisee, and looked up to characters whose goodness might remind him of his inferiority, instead of dwelling on the vices of the world, and viewing mankind in the worst light, that he might find a justification for his own errors.

FROM this consideration alone, I trust, you see how the humility, which is exhibited to us in the person of the publican, contributes to exalt the human character, and how the arrogant pride and illiberality of the Pharisee tend to degrade it.

HITHERTO I have considered their conduct and the temper of their minds only
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in a moral point of view ; in the following discourse, I shall consider them in a religious light. In the mean time permit me to close the subject for the present, with some few exhortations which it naturally suggests.

STUDY humility as the foundation of every virtue ; and remember that our blessed Lord, who in his own sacred person united every human and divine excellence, was the meekest and lowliest of mankind. But by humility, we are not to understand that groveling disposition or slavish turn of mind, which often characterizes the most worthless of the human species, and which is always associated with the meaner vices : Christian humility is so far from being an abject submission, that it is in reality the highest exaltation of the soul. It should spring from the two great sources of every mental excellence, our reverence of God and our love of man. It is equally remote from pride and meanness. It is a habit

of mind arising from internal sentiment rather than from the observance of any positive precept ; a disposition that teaches us to consider all mankind as brethren ; and is never found inconsistent with true dignity, except when it is misconceived by the ignorant, affected by hypocrites, or assumed by knaves.

STUDY humility in this sense, therefore, as the true source of social love ; and should you ever be inclined to think unjustly of the world, before you cherish the hateful principles of misanthropy, carefully examine your own bosom, and ask if no Pharisaical pride lurks there, which fills you with ideas only of your own merits, and makes you despise others ; consider if no sense of guilt seeks for justification from the worst examples ; no self-love, or erroneous opinions, that make you view men with prejudiced eyes ; and particularly ask yourself if no disappointed passion, that originated in folly, perhaps, fours your mind, and makes you hate
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your fellow-creatures without a cause. Be unwilling to indulge any uncharitable opinions of human nature, on your own account; for the mind by long brooding over the stratagems and mischiefs, the wickedness and vices of the world, might in time lose sight of every thing that is amiable, and at last find its own purity stained, by the turpitude of those ideas with which it has been so long conversant. Reflect on the characters of those who are always most ready to think and speak uncharitably of their neighbours, and you will generally find that they are such as least merit our affection and esteem. They may not perhaps be destitute of good qualities, but all their virtues wear some ungracious and forbidding form. They may not want religion, but then religion in some minds, instead of regulating the passions and improving the heart, serves only to bewilder the understanding, or to create that austere pride, and unsocial temper, which dispose men to look on all around

them with the evil eye of the Pharisee in the text.

WICKED as the world is by all confessed to be, there is still ample room to display every virtue, and to diffuse the benevolence of a good heart. Many worthy characters are at all times suffering undeservedly, and struggling with the difficulties of life in poverty and obscurity; some from the vices, and more, perhaps, from the follies of mankind. Such is the present state of the world, that neither the virtuous nor the wise can always ensure prosperity; nor can the peaceable and innocent live secure against the violence and oppression of the wicked. These may claim, at least, the soothing comforts of friendship, if not the kind assistance of opulence and power, to shelter them from misery, and bring them forward into notice.

IN order to settle your principles of action, do not regard the practice of the
world,

world, nor follow its customs or its fashions any farther than is perfectly consistent with innocence. Act your own part well, though you do it singly, and think it honorable to depart from the multitude, rather than do evil. To determine, at all times, and in all exigencies, what should be the rule of life, consult the sacred word of God, as interpreted by the free, unbiassed voice of reason. And as the holy apostle exhorts us, “ whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report ; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, let us think on these things.” That the good intentions of the heart may neither be frustrated, nor abused, unite, if possible, the utmost prudence, with the exercise of every good work ; but be at all times careful, lest prudence, which should only be the guardian of virtue, might diminish its worth,

worth, or chill its native ardor, by infusing into the heart the spirit of jealousy, suspicion and distrust. In a word, be in every transaction with the world, what our blessed Lord advised his disciples; "as wise as serpents, and as harmless as doves."

S E R-

S E R M O N IX.

ON CHRISTIAN HUMILITY.

LUKE xviii. 10, 11, 12, 13.

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a Publican.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican.

I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

And the Publican standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

IN the preceding discourse I considered the two characters of the Pharisee and Publican in a moral point of view. It remains

remains to consider them in a more important light ; as affording us ample instruction for the discharge of religious duty, and teaching us to entertain a proper sense of ourselves, as we stand in relation to the Almighty Father of the universe.

IF meekness and humbleness of mind are virtues which become us as citizens of the world ; if they are the handmaids that lead to honor, and are indispensibly necessary to the perfection of character in human society, how much more requisite are they in us, as subjects of the supreme Governor of the world ! Surely we cannot hope to open any profitable intercourse with Him, who is infinitely perfect, without making our first approach with reverence ; nor can we ever expect to cultivate his Divine Favor without first “ standing “ in awe,” and offering him the willing sacrifice of a contrite heart.

WE are urged to this humble line of duty by various considerations, which reason
son

son will suggest, and which the revelation of Christ will abundantly confirm. With men whose minds are impressed with proper ideas of the Divine Nature, a sense of their own ignorance and weakness will offer the first motives to humility. We are placed in the midst of a wonderful world, and surrounded with mysteries. Every exertion of the mind, perhaps, makes us feel the imperfection and inferiority of our nature more sensibly. Little, very little is the satisfactory knowledge that we can boast of, and that too is confined within narrow bounds. The few rays of science that spring from the human mind cast but a faint and ineffectual light; like a glimmering lamp, fixed in a world of darkness, its feeble emanations reach only far enough to direct the bewildered traveller in a very small circle. When we look back on the variegated path which we have already trodden, memory and observation may furnish us with an imperfect experience of what has already happened, but cannot secure us from danger that is to come. If

we attend to the present course of life, we find that we are often harrassed with fear, or deceived by hope, and feel that in no moment of reflection are we free from perplexity and anxious doubt : but when we extend our views into futurity, the mist is impenetrable. Of things that seem to concern us intimately, we are mainly ignorant. We know not what dangers now threaten us, what calamities are gathering over our heads, or what temptations are preparing to enthral our virtue. Even in spiritual concerns, in those divine matters which so highly interest us, the holy apostle tells us, we are permitted “ to see only as “ through a glass darkly.” Justly therefore hath this been termed “ the land of “ shadows” and the vale of darkness; for even of ourselves are we most ignorant. The glorious mark of distinction between us and the mere animals we know little of. We talk of the mind without any real knowledge concerning it, beyond the consciousness of its existence. Of its essence we are entirely ignorant. It has power indeed

indeed to perceive its own ideas and feel its own affections ; but cannot trace out their origin, or analyze their nature with any degree of accuracy or precision.

THOUGH our knowledge is so limited, yet our power seems to be still more so. We might indeed distress one another for a few short years, and wantonly harass the poor creatures of the earth. These being still more helpless than ourselves, are made subservient to our appetites and pleasures ; but not an atom of all the matter which crowds the universe can we call into being, and not an atom, strictly speaking, are we able to destroy. We might see the storm gather, but cannot escape its fury, and sometimes view the uplifted arm, without being able to avoid the blow.

THESE and many other considerations, while they shew our own folly and weakness, discover to us the infinite wisdom and power of the great Creator. And,
“ why

“ why are these things so ? ” The sacred volume answers the question ; “ that no
“ flesh should glory in his presence ; that
“ we might not be high-minded one to-
“ wards another, but do justly, love mercy,
“ and walk humbly with our God.”

WHAT has been said suggests another powerful motive to humility. The natural consequence of our ignorance and want of power, is distress of various kinds. Evils come upon us, which we have neither wisdom to foresee, nor power to remove. To-day, the sudden loss of fortune threatens us with poverty ; to-morrow, the death of one whose friendship and affection formed perhaps the greatest part of our felicity, overwhelms us with anguish. Not sufficiently afflicted by the awful visitations of Heaven, we bring additional evils on ourselves. Sometimes ambition lays the foundation of bitter disappointment, guilt and misery ; and sometimes peace is frightened from our bosoms by fierce and vindictive passions ; by the violence of enmity, or
the

the rancour of revenge. Now too a ruffian stabs, or plunders in the dark ; and at all times there are enemies ready to subvert, or undermine our happiness.

SUCH is the melancholy state of human nature. Why this should originally form a law in the dispensation of providence, it is not for us to enquire. The great and becoming doctrine of man is submission ; not complaint, or presumptuous murmuring that he is no better and no happier ; but contentment and thankfulness for being what he is. That “ we are born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards,” is the language of scripture. Instead, therefore, of vainly enquiring why it is so, it behoves us to consider what purposes are wisely answered by this ordination of providence, and what lines of moral and religious duty are marked out by it. This will lead me to an application of the matter before us. When the world frowns upon us ; when our best intentions are frustrated, and our most vigorous exertions fail of producing

the wished-for effect ; when hope has often cheated us with fallacious prospects, and the mind, worn out with disappointments, sinks under the pressure of calamity ; where can we fly for succour, but to the mercy and protection of God ? “ In the multitude of sorrows, his comforts only are sufficient to refresh the soul.” If we seek any other refuge from distress, we shall in all probability lay the foundation of fresh disappointment. Not to mention the fluctuating state of human affairs, the world is delusive in its prospects, partial and capricious in its rewards. To the prosperous it offers no settled point of rest, and to the unfortunate it affords no asylum in which they might learn to forget their woes. On the other hand, religion opens a sanctuary to ALL ; but chiefly to the wretched. Contrary to the practice of the world, she confers her peculiar blessings on those who most need them ; “ the poor in spirit ; “ them that mourn, and them that are “ persecuted for righteousness sake.” Under every affliction of providence, they may
look

look forward, with the steady eye of faith, to the awful day of retribution, which will soon arrive; and if they continue in well doing, may be assured, that “in due time they shall reap, if they faint not.” This was the only comfort that cheered the best of men, under the heaviest of all worldly misfortunes; “they were troubled,” we are told, “on every side, yet not distressed; they were perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.”

IN like manner, every good man laboring with the accumulated ills of life, will find a never-failing comfort and support in religious hope. His worldly affairs may change, enemies may persecute him, and friends may prove false; but his chief happiness is founded on faith and confidence in heaven; a rock about which the storms of fortune may beat, but cannot prevail. Instead, therefore, of idly murmuring against the miseries and disappointments of life, we might employ our minds to some

advantage in tracing out that good which naturally flows from them, and those duties with which they are inseparably united.

THUS, we might perceive, that we are taught the virtues of humanity in the most forcible manner, by the misfortunes of others. Nor is this the only salutary purpose gained. The general calamities of life, added to the uncertainty and imperfection of its enjoyments, teach us more than any thing else, to place our chief dependance on God; and this is the great duty of religion. The longer we live, the more clearly do we discover the vanity of the world, and the less eager are we of its pleasures and amusements. By the many difficulties we meet with in the prosecution of our desires, and the frequent disappointments we experience in their gratification, we are gradually taught to repose on the comforts of religion for true happiness, and to quiet the tumults of the bosom with those calm joys which spring from a well-grounded

grounded piety. As we approach the close of life, the better are we formed, by nature, for the discharge of devotional duties, and the opening of those bright prospects which revelation has disclosed to us. Every thing concurs to make us look up to the Everlasting Father, as the source of all good, and to consult his eternal will as the only sure rule of life. By experience only we learn the vanity and vexation of the world, and as our attachments to its business and pleasures diminish, it was wisely ordered in a state of trial, that our dependence on God should increase.

THUS have I endeavoured to exhibit to you the ignorance, the want of power, and the absolute dependence of man, as he stands in the universal chain of being, connected with his Maker. Can I offer you more commanding motives to humility? Whether you reflect on the condition of human nature, or the attributes of God, you will be taught this great and fundamental virtue in the most forcible

manner. His wisdom and his mercy fill our hearts with love and admiration; his justice and his power command our reverence and awe; while the secret dispensations of his providence teach us to place our whole reliance on him, as the supreme Governor of the world, "for every good and perfect gift." The whole system of nature, our own anxious and uncertain state, the plan of invisible power, as far as we can trace its operations, all conspire to create in our minds those meek and humble dispositions, which our blessed Lord so constantly recommended.

WHILE considerations so extensive and important shew us that these sober affections are at once necessary to our duty and our happiness; while religion sows the seeds of such gentle virtues in our heart; what should be their genuine fruit? What, but that unassuming spirit of charity to one another which christianity every where inculcates, and the constant practice of meek and humble piety towards God? A
mind

mind thus formed to reverence and humility, would carefully examine into all its frailties, and instead of boasting of its own deserts, would seek “to work out its salvation with fear and trembling.”

How much the Pharisee in the text was a stranger to this great duty of self-humiliation, is sufficiently obvious. He seems to have thought himself quite secure of the divine favor ; and such was his insensibility to all his errors, so wholly unprepared was his mind for true prayer, that his only business in the holy temple was to enumerate two unprofitable duties (duties which do not deserve the name of piety) and to thank God for his superiority over “other men.” Proud and presumptuous mortal ! He knew little of that brotherly love which ties the bands of social union ; and still less of that reverential awe which forms a necessary part of devotion to God. He forgot that “in his presence no man
“living shall be justified ; that he resist-
“eth the proud and giveth grace to the
O 4 “humble ;

“ humble ; and that his sacrifice is a
“ broken spirit, an humble and a contrite
“ heart.”

OUR blessed Lord has wonderfully adapted this little story to our improvement, as it tends to correct some of those common evils, which he knew would at all times be most likely to prevail ; pride, blindness to our own imperfections, want of charity to man, and ignorance of our duty towards God naturally arising from them. This last indeed is the grand, ultimate evil which will mostly endanger our happiness. We should at all times be careful, therefore, either to remove, or avoid it, by tracing out its origin and viewing its effects. It flows from different sources ; sometimes from false imaginations or disordered passions ; sometimes from enthusiasm and superstitious fears ; sometimes from guilt, and often from indolence.

CAST your eyes upon society, and you may observe many who dignify themselves
with

with the name of Christians, inattentive to the practical duties of life, and like the Pharisee in the text, justified from the delusions of their own minds, or the impositions of others. See them fly from the arduous tasks of virtue, and the rational exercises of piety, to the vain subterfuges of folly or of guilt. Instead of actions that spring from true benevolence and friendship to man, hear them talk of imaginary communications in language that is utterly unintelligible, or repeat waking dreams about spiritual experiences. Were we to extend our observation, and consider other classes of men, "who trust in themselves that they are righteous, and who sometimes, I fear, despise others;" we should find too many that are always ready to disparage the efficacy of those duties which they have neglected to practise, and either justifying themselves, like the Pharisee in the text, from the examples of the wicked, or seeking comfort in the delusions of a mind, first at variance with itself, and by degrees seeking repose, perhaps, in principles formed to its own depravity.

BUT

BUT though false and artificial notions of duty are much to be regretted in others, and guarded against in ourselves; yet the want of constancy and perseverance in the plain, acknowledged path of christian duty, is still more so. Attend to the course of men's lives in common, whatever be their religious tenets, and you will find it filled up with alternate successions of vice and virtue, piety and profaneness; repenting to-day, and transgressing to-morrow; at one time practising the mean and pitiful arts of vanity and self-love, at another, occupied in the exercise of charity and the kind offices of friendship; in the evening rioting in sinful and intemperate pleasures, and in the morning, strictly engaged in devotional duty.

AMONG the general evils of life, I know not if any is to be more lamented than this inconsistency of the human character. It is this, as much as any thing, that renders our steps unsure in the world. It is

this that often converts friendship into disgust, and bids every one “ who thinks he “ standeth, take heed lest he fall.”

MANY, too many are there at all times floating loosely on the wide current of life, ready to receive any direction that passion or the gale of popular humor may give them. Their minds unfixed by any principles, and therefore always in suspense, easily yield to the solicitations of pleasure, or the assails of vice, whenever appetite or passion craves indulgence. The calls of duty are no longer heard than when temptation is removed, and the wandering heart at rest. Hence it is that we perceive such quick transitions from good to evil ; from temperance to debauchery ; from religion to impiety. This leads me lastly to explain the conduct of the Publican, and recommend it to your practice.

Do not suppose that his short and penitential prayer sprung from one of those occasional FITS of piety, and that immediately

ately after he relapsed into all the vices of a loose and disorderly life ; that would be gaining justification on terms by much too easy, even under the merciful dispensation of the holy Gospel. For there our Lord has expressly told us, that it is not
“ every one that faith unto me, Lord,
“ Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of
“ heaven ; but he that doeth the will of
“ my Father which is in heaven.” We must not understand, therefore, that his meekness and prayer were the momentary effects of guilt or fear ; but that they sprung from habitual humility, and the steady spirit of true devotion. He knew that when we have done our utmost, in the sight of God, “ we are but unprofit-
“ able servants ;” and therefore with a mind overawed by the perfections of the Divine Nature, and fully sensible of his own frailties, he was at all times ready to smite upon his bosom, and cry for mercy. He knew that whatever his merits might have been, it was at once presumptuous and unnecessary to recount them, for his
“ heavenly

“ heavenly Father saw him in secret, and
“ would reward him openly.” Fully sensible that “ pride was not made for man,” he cultivated the meekest and humblest dispositions, and sought the favor of God by penitence and prayer.

LET not the wretch, therefore, who has lived in the habitual indulgence of vicious passions, hope for that justification which the pious Publican found, by attending to the great duties of religion for the present hour ; since this might be the sudden effect of guilt and fear, or (what is too often the case) nothing but an indolent, unmeaning practice, under the form of sanctity ; but let him set about the great work of repentance with the firmest resolution. Before he suffers himself to rest in security, or hope for justification, let his devotion be calm and steady ; not an occasional PASSION, but a constant HABIT of the soul ; not a refuge from the terrors of superstition, or the rebukings of a wounded conscience, but the rational and sublime enjoyment of
a well-

a well-regulated mind, in its intercourse with heaven.

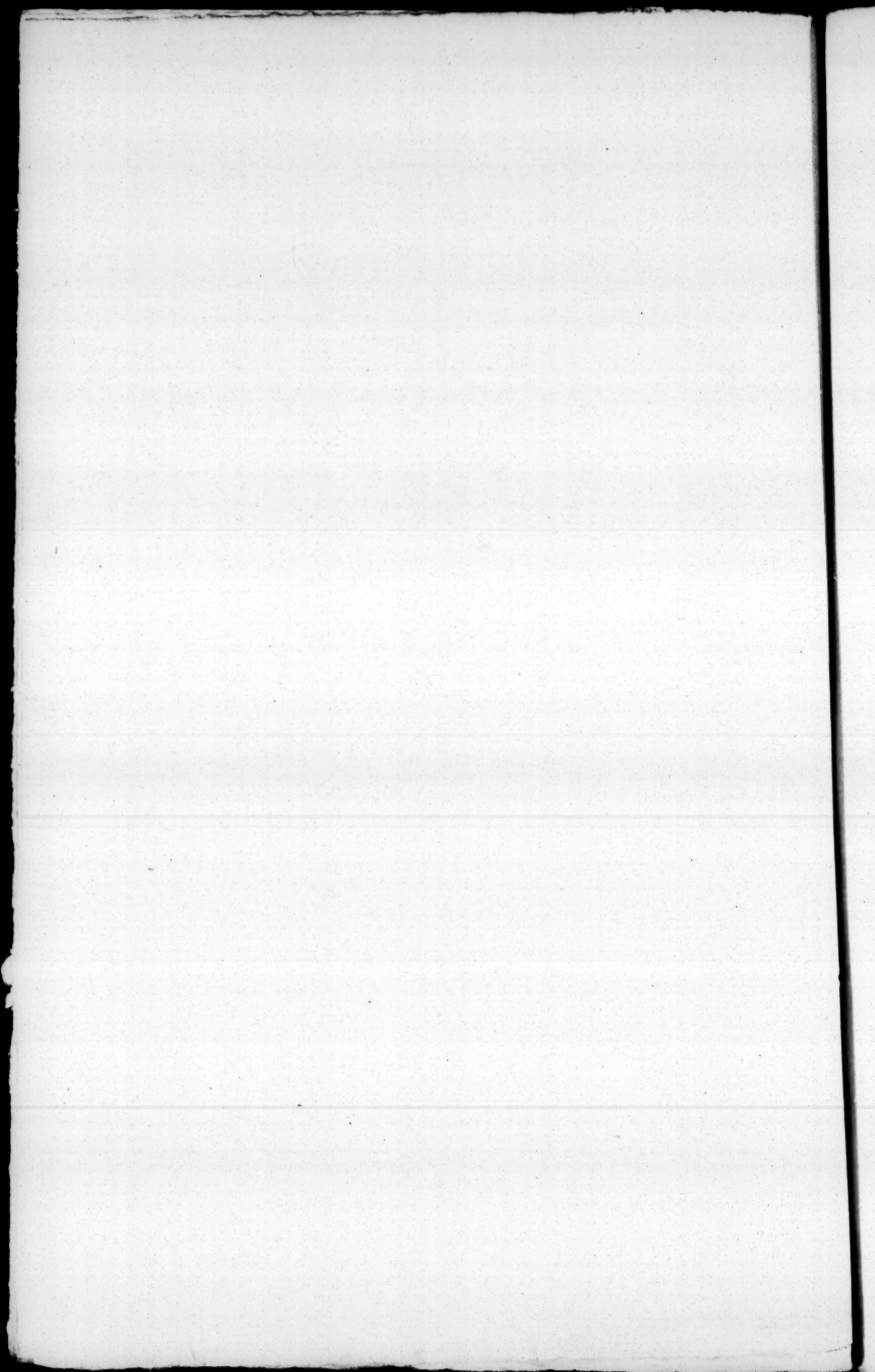
THE painful calls of duty should by no means be the only motives to devotion. The soul should so mingle love with reverence, so unite the idea of divine mercy with that of divine justice, that it might feel the most pleasurable satisfaction, and be disposed to rejoice; but consistent with the apostle's precept, to "rejoice with trembling."

BE careful, therefore, lest you mistake the loose and involuntary emotions of piety, for those settled dispositions of the mind, and those constant habits of goodness, which our blessed religion so uniformly teaches and requires. There is a wide difference between the imperfect devotion of one whose course of duty is daily interrupted by unruly passions, though he might not be deficient in the external discharge of it, and the man whose affections do not jar with his principles, and who, therefore, renders
unto

unto God a service that is chearful, uniform and willing. The one resembles the lightning flashing suddenly from the dark cloud ; the other is like the unremitting sunshine of a clear summer's-day.

LET us endeavour to keep our duty in this constant tenor, both in our commerce with the world, and our services to God. To acquire consistency of character in every concern of life, let us fix the attention of our minds on the great moral Governor of the universe. His omnipresence, his justice, the uncertainty of our state, and his promises of future judgment, are all powerful motives to constancy in the discharge of duty. To guard ourselves against the many impositions of pride, vanity and self-love, let us imitate the example of the meek and penitential publican. Be assured no one is so perfect, as not to need repentance ; no one is so free from error but that he might smite upon his bosom, and cry, " God be merciful to me a sinner."

S E R-



S E R M O N X.

ON THE FRAILITY OF HUMAN VIRTUE, &c.

M A T. xxvi. 22.

Lord, is it I?

THE occasion which gave rise to this question was awful and affecting. The hour was now at hand, when the Saviour of the world was to exert the last effort of patient fortitude, and endure the agonies of crucifixion. Previous to this tremendous scene of suffering and of death, he gave his disciples all the consolation in his power, mingled with wholesome admonition and affectionate advice. In the fervency of prayer he implored his heavenly Father's protection for them. In

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a manner more personal and endearing than at any former period, he gave them his last instructions. He warned them of the dangers they had to encounter, and the difficulties they had to surmount. They were sent, he told them, as lambs among wolves ; they were to be persecuted by the world, hated, and, at length, destroyed. But while he foretold these their sufferings and calamities, that they might be enabled to endure them, he promised them comfort and support from heaven ; nor did they want motives that sprung from the most endearing friendship, to render their conduct steady, and their ministry effectual.

ON the eve of his departure from the world, he had appointed to eat the passover with his beloved disciples. He brake bread with them and blessed it for the last time, and was to drink of the fruit of the vine no more, until he drank it new with them in his Father's kingdom. What their sentiments of love and adoration must have been on this solemn occasion, and how they

they were blended with the soft emotions of sorrow, we might in some measure conceive, but can by no means express. While he instituted this divine repast as a holy sacrament that might perpetuate, with grateful piety, the remembrance of his death and sufferings, his merits and his love; while they hung, with steadfast attention and adoring love, on the lips of their dying Saviour, he interrupted this heavenly intercourse by charging one of them with an act of the most flagrant treachery and guilt. “ Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me,” was the dreadful accusation.

THEIR behaviour on this occasion appears somewhat singular. “ They were “ exceeding sorrowful,” as St. Matthew relates, “ and began every one of them to “ say, Lord, is it I?” Conscious as they all were of their innocence, (if we except the traitor Judas) and steadfast as they all had been in their attachment, they neither treated the charge with indignation, nor

considered the crime which it exhibited as an impossibility. They had, indeed, ever regarded the words of their Saviour as sacred and inviolable truth; and as he had deeply impressed them with a sense of human frailty, they received this dreadful intelligence with an implicit belief. Sorrow and confusion were the effects it produced on their minds. Whatever confidence they had in their own strength, and with what justice soever that confidence might have been founded, there were no vain protestations of unshaken integrity, and no boast of invincible virtue; but every one, while he distrusted the testimony of his own heart, was desirous of exculpating himself, by asking with trembling anxiety, "Lord, is it I?"

It is to the conduct of our blessed Lord's disciples in this distressing situation, that I wish to direct your attention. It may suggest to us a train of reflections no less interesting than profitable. We may learn from it the duty of distrusting our own strength,

strength, in certain cases, at least, and the necessity of guarding against all temptation. From a conviction of the infirmities of man, we may reflect on the vice and folly of the world with the just, but charitable spirit of the gospel, see the propriety of self-examination, and discipline our own hearts.

It is natural to associate with innocence, an open temper and a generous boldness. Suspicion, with regard to others, is sometimes the growth of a depraved heart, but oftener, perhaps, a groveling habit of mind arising from a base intercourse with the world. Diffidence and distrust of ourselves are seldom felt, while we possess the consciousness of good dispositions, and before our virtue has suffered from ignorance, or the violence of unexpected temptations. But we cannot consider at too early a period that the present life is a continual warfare. Difficulties and dangers surround us on every side, and they will be multiplied to him who expects them not. The

enemy, indeed, is not always discoverable ; we are sometimes wounded, before we see the shaft, and in the flowery paths which we tread with most delight, lurks the serpent that will sting us. The best security, therefore, for innocence, is always to suppose ourselves in danger. This will teach us not the cold, and often hypocritical caution of the world, but the prudent circumspection of christians, that we may avoid those temptations which lie before us, and arm ourselves against those evils which “ must come.”

COULD we read the human heart, could we recal past events, and minutely examine the many complicated and almost imperceptible motives of action, we should find that more have been deluded by thoughtless indiscretion and too great confidence in their own goodness, than by any rooted depravity or natural inclination to evil. Observe the youth, who, in his first career, catches at every pleasure within his reach, and indulges himself in every gratification that arises from

from sentiment and passion, or that springs immediately from the senses. He is conscious of no crime ; he trusts in the rectitude of his intentions and the goodness of his heart, to secure him against the taint of corruption ; but, alas ! he knows not the dangers that lie in his way, nor marks the boundaries where vice and pleasure, guilt and innocence begin to blend. Here is the place where we all ought to make a resolute stand, and guard ourselves against the first encroachments of evil : for so easily does sin beset us, that even our best dispositions might lead us into error, if not regulated by steady principles, and influenced by the mild authority of christian duties. Charity and pity, love and friendship, all have their excesses. From an amiable, but inconsiderate ardor, we are apt to be entangled with the obligations of opposite duties, and the heart, though at first actuated by the generous impulse of virtue, is often disordered, and sometimes corrupted, by irregular and contending passions.

IF we consider those propensities, which however innocent, when indulged to a certain degree, have always a tendency to evil, we shall find a wider door open for the admission of every depravity. The love of pleasure and the indulgence of pride, taken in the most extensive sense, we may rank, perhaps, among the first corrupters of our innocence. Harmless amusement and lawful gratification are the invitations which the former holds out; personal dignity and independent spirit tempt us to enlist under the banners of the latter. To the dangerous dominion of these ruling passions how many may attribute their misery and guilt! But though we may look around us and see thousands hastening to their ruin through the same paths that we have entered, yet we are not terrified for our own safety, and seldom stop in our mad career to ask, "Lord, is it I?"

THIS vain security arises from the mistaken idea, that a stated degree of indulgence will always satisfy the cravings of
passion,

passion, and that no temptation can fall in our way sufficiently powerful to make us transgress the bounds of duty. Yet experience might tell us, that if we drink sparingly at the fountains of pleasure, we generally return with increasing appetites ; and that if we take larger draughts we are in danger of being lost. However the inability, therefore, of quenching our thirst might sometimes wound the mind with painful reflection, yet happy is he who wants the power of gratifying every wish that rises in his heart. Our disappointments indeed might sometimes be regarded as blessings. Such is the frailty and imperfection of human nature, particularly if the heart be capable of warm affections, that, beyond certain limits, we cannot indulge desires in themselves amiable, perhaps, with perfect security. We know not with what dangerous, if not guilty passions they may combine in their progress, and by what secret and irresistible force they may undermine the foundations of virtue. So needful at all times is the precept of our blessed Lord,

Lord, " Watch and pray, lest ye enter in-
" to temptation."

IF the best of men, when one only was accused of treachery and ingratitude, could ask, with deep humiliation, " Lord, is it " I?" if they who were chosen from the world to preach the gospel of Christ, and whose virtues entitled them to such exalted distinction, as to be called by their divine Master " the salt of the earth ;" if these men could admit, at least, the POSSIBILITY of guilt, and that too in an atrocious degree, when no dangerous passion alarmed their souls, but when their hearts were filled with the grateful emotions of pious love and reverence ; what might not we justly apprehend on occasions far less favorable to innocence and virtue ? when, for instance, we indulge the rising impulse of anger, yield to the sollicitation of loose and voluptuous desires, though the power of gratifying them might be mercifully withheld, or share in the banquets of dissipation ?

WE cannot too often “take heed unto
“ourselves, nor keep our souls with sufficient diligence.” The most powerful seductions are often administered under such pleasing forms, that we cannot well regard them with suspicion; and latent mischiefs spring up around us, before we are fully sensible that we have strayed from the paths of duty. When once the taint of corruption also has fastened on us, the misfortune of it is, we cannot tell with what a fatal progress it will spread, nor how soon sin will establish her dominion over us.

THESE reflections, which reason will acknowledge to be just, and experience knows to be true, the history of man, as faithfully recorded in the holy volume, will abundantly confirm.

DAVID, when he viewed the wife of Uriah with fond, but criminal admiration, little thought himself capable of the vile, premeditated murder of her husband. The cruel HAMAN might not have supposed that
his

his pride, when first wounded by the trifling disrespect of Mordecai, the Jew, would have led him to conceive the horrid design of destroying, not only him, but all his race, wherever dispersed throughout his sovereign's dominions. Nor is it easy to imagine that AHITHOPHEL knew the danger and the guilt that always attended his vain and intolerant spirit, when because his counsel was rejected, the wretch went and hanged himself. Yet such are the dreadful consequences of passions that at first may flatter human nature perhaps, but which in their progress, gradually dissolve the ties of duty, and at length overwhelm us with guilt and misery.

IF we examine the New Testament, there are examples equally striking. We find JUDAS, by some unaccountable depravity, betraying his heavenly Master into the hands of his enemies for thirty pieces of silver; and that too with a KISS. Probably the gratification of some craving appetite, that had overpowered all sense of shame as well
well

well as virtue, tempted him to grasp at the "price of iniquity," and to commit a crime at which his nature, at some past period of life, would have shuddered with horror. The shameful denial of PETER, after all his passionate and earnest vows, is too well known to be particularly dwelt on. But to mention one instance more. Do you think that HERODIAS, when she first entertained the hope of becoming Herod's wife, was sensible of the dreadful guilt which lurked in her heart, and which the indulgence of her lawless desires soon gave birth to? But yet we see such at length was the wildness of her rage, and such was the fury of her revenge against the venerable Baptist, only because he had with manly boldness opposed her criminal passion, that she rather longed for his blood than wealth and power, even when she might have been gratified to the half of Herod's kingdom. Revenge of the most horrid nature had by degrees taken full possession of her soul, and she whom we find no where accused of guilt before, could now feast her eyes with murder; for she required

required that the head of John Baptist should be brought and given her in a charger. His death alone was not sufficient ; she could feel a horrid satisfaction in viewing the pale and bleeding head of her enemy !

OF such depravity is the human soul capable ! So prone indeed are we to evil, and so subject to temptation, that almost every desire of the heart might ultimately corrupt our innocence, and enthrall our virtue. The discipline of the passions, therefore, is one of the most important duties of life ; but in order to render this discipline effectual, we must “ put on the whole “ armour of God,” and be ever ready to combat with the enemy. There is no time to sleep or slumber away in fancied security. Not only the citadel, but the out-works of virtue must be guarded with unwearied diligence, if we hope to repel the invaders of our peace, and shew ourselves worthy of “ the Captain of our salvation.”

COULD

COULD we, indeed, propose to ourselves certain rules of action, sufficiently comprehensive for the various situations of life; could we rely on ourselves for the due performance of every social and religious duty, from the disinterested love of our neighbour and the pure worship of God; could we say with confidence and truth, when any passion rises in the heart, thus far shall thy dominion extend and no farther; then might we allow ourselves to walk with less circumspection, and pursue, with heedless joy, the gratification of our wishes. But, not to dwell on the turbulent disorders of such violent passions as ambition, anger, malice and revenge; nor to mention the more secret, though no less dangerous delusions of the mind; how few are there that embark on pleasure's smiling stream, can determine where they will stop? Down the enchanting tide we sail with gay delight and thoughtless negligence; we are charmed with the present enjoyment, and fancy anticipates new gratifications; the soul
slumbers

slumbers in visionary bliss, and too often before she rouses from her lethargy, our fragile bark is left exposed upon the sand, agitated by the violence of the waves, or dashed against the hidden rocks, and swallowed up in the ocean !

CONSIDER the wretch who now with deep contrition, perhaps, mourns the fatal consequences of his folly or his guilt ; enquire into the cause of his misconduct, and you will find that vice and disorder, sin and corruption imperceptibly took possession of his heart. Nay, examine the criminal who forfeits his life to the violated laws of society, and he will tell you, there was a time, when his heart was at least free from any ATROCIOUS sin, and when he would have shrunk with horror from the crimes which he has been led to perpetrate. Perhaps some may truly add, that wicked companions had taken advantage of their unguarded minds, and by their scoffs and sneers seduced them from the sober paths of duty ; that the obligations of virtue and religion

religion were insensibly lost, and the mind, at length, influenced by no motive, or principle, but what sprung from sensual indulgence and present gratification.

AN insatiable thirst for the pleasures of the world, courted in a variety of different shapes, and a proud spirit of independence, are indeed the most abundant sources of misery and guilt. These, whether presented to the mind under the pleasing form of lawful enjoyment, or as peculiar exemptions from the duties of a christian, too often, in their progress, unhinge our minds, and destroy the efficacy of every virtue. God forbid, that the love of pleasure, or the indulgence of pride, should produce in any of us the guilt which the former brought on DAVID, or the infamy and ruin with which the latter overwhelmed HAMAN! Yet such alarming examples in men, not wholly abandoned, might teach us to examine our own hearts with deep humiliation, when we feel the first incitements to evil, and ask ourselves,

as though we were in the presence of our heavenly Judge, "Lord, is it I?" The world in general, we may observe, consists of mixed characters; of men that are neither superlatively good, nor superlatively bad; that want not good dispositions, though blended with an unavoidable portion of human frailty; that are ever ready to avow their detestation of vice, though not always studious to avoid it; and that always profess their reverence for virtue, though they have not sufficient fortitude invariably to practise it. These seem to be the proper and more immediate objects of moral and religious discipline; and to them the precepts of christianity more particularly apply. If, therefore, to the bulk of mankind we confine our observations, at present, we shall still be able to trace the lamentable effects of pleasure and of pride in men who are not entirely negligent of their duty; but who uphold some degree of character and reputation in the world. Waste of time and waste of fortune, looseness of principle and habits of idleness, are,

are, perhaps, the invariable effects of the former ; vanity and self-love, frequent mortification, enmity and domestic tyranny, are sure to wait upon the latter.

THE knowledge of this weakness and corruption of our nature should teach, or at least enforce, some of the most amiable, though too often neglected parts of christian duty. In contemplating the misfortunes and judging of the failings of our fellow-creatures, we should learn from it to regulate our conduct by the charity, candour and forbearance of the holy gospel. Much of the vice and disorder that reigns among us might be attributed to motives that ought to excite our pity ; to a state of ignorance and wretched poverty ; to a total want, or neglect of virtuous education, and the seducing influence of bad example continually presented to the mind. Some also are exposed to extraordinary trials of fortitude and constancy. The hearts of all are not equally warmed with the love of virtue, nor in equal danger of being

misled by the ardor of the passions. Temptations appear to different characters in different shapes; some are more exposed to the assaults of evil than others, and some who were well fortified in that part where they had reason to dread the enemy, might have been unexpectedly attacked where they were most vulnerable. In fighting the good, but arduous fight of christian faith, few ought to consider themselves as conquerors; many must be wounded, and some must fall,

VICE, it is true, should always disgust us, and misery, when devoid of innocence, will be regarded without respect, if not without pity. Yet in our intercourse with the world, few are there whose errors will not admit of some extenuation; and if there are many wretched, in consequence of their guilt, let it be remembered that, in this life, there are many prosperous who have little pretensions to virtue.

“ JUDGE

“ JUDGE not that ye be not judged,” is a rule of conduct that could never have come from the mouth of a human teacher, and is truly worthy of the Saviour of the world. There are not many who can lay claim to such superior excellence as might authorize them to pass an unqualified sentence on others, and none should be forward to shew the rigor of their justice, before they have so thoroughly purified their own hearts, as to be assured that they are not establishing, in the sight of God and Man, an example that might hereafter operate against themselves. We should, indeed, “ be instant in season, and out of “ season,” in checking the progress of vice and promoting the cause of virtue. We should exhort with all meekness and long-suffering. When severity would be ineffectual and condemnation vain, we might, with wholesome reproof, or patient gentleness, often heal the wounds of the mind, and stop the further progress of corruption, by imitating the example of Him who would “ not break a bruised reed.”

BUT there is always a mixture of depravity in spreading, with apparent satisfaction, the crimes and vices of the world. Let the abhorrence of sin be as deeply fixed in our own bosoms as possible, and let the fear of offending the Almighty Father of the universe be ever uppermost in our hearts; but let us be always careful that we derive not our virtues or our merits from the prevalent guilt of others. When we see the votary of pleasure become the victim of sin, and he who has never “governed his spirit,” hurried on to the commission of crimes of the blackest dye; instead of indulging a vain spirit of exultation, and “thanking God that we are not like other men,” we should do much better to imitate the conduct of our Saviour’s disciples, and ask, with deep concern, “Lord, is it I?” Have I so disciplined my heart that I am in no danger of such evils? Am I so fortified, by thy holy word and counsel, that I may defy temptation, and repose in safety, without fearing the sin that doth so easily beset us,
“ in

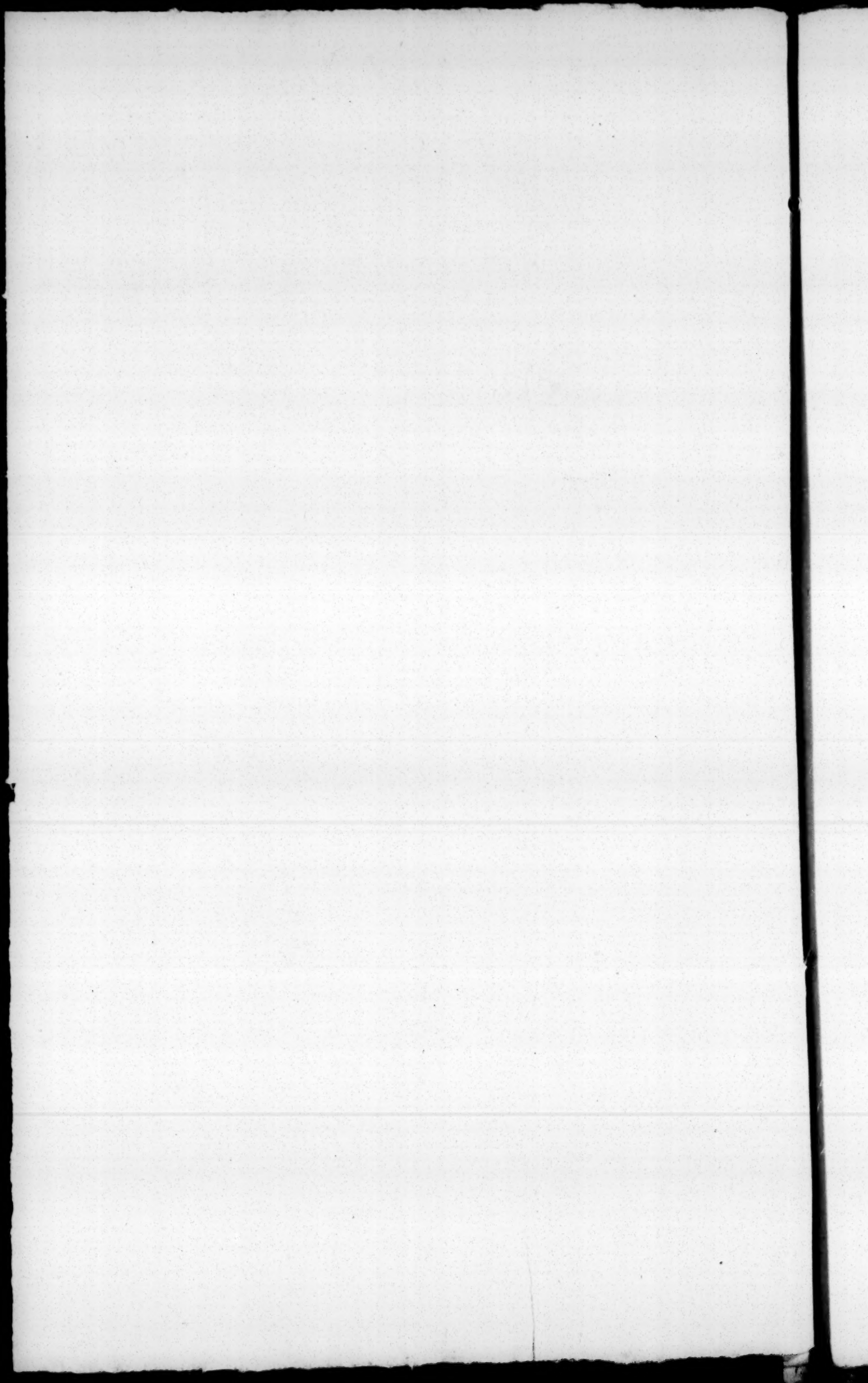
“ in the midst of a guilty and seducing
“ world ?” Such reflections might enable
us to derive good from evil, and lead us to
a more perfect knowledge of our “ pre-
“ sumptuous sins,” as well as of our more
“ secret faults.”

BEFORE we indulge ourselves in open
condemnation and violent reproach, let us
consider whether we are not more indebted
for the small portion of goodness we may
claim, to the guardian care of providence
and the kindness of others, than to any
acquired strength or exertion of our own.
Frequently commune with your own hearts
on this important subject, and guard against
the delusions of vanity and self-love. Ex-
amine if your virtue be an active principle,
capable of combating the ills, and endur-
ing, with patient fortitude, the afflictions
of life ; or whether it be a something dor-
mant in your bosoms, that has never yet
been roused by any alarming danger, and
of which therefore you neither know the
VALUE or the POWER. Do not think your-

selves worthy of being called the disciples and followers of Christ, till the victory over temptation has been often decided, and till your virtues have, at least, been proved, if not perfected like his, by suffering and calamity. If you contentedly rank yourselves among those thoughtless mortals who are satisfied with good dispositions only, and take no care to guard them against the deceitfulness and perversion of sin; if you have no steady views in your conduct, no principles of action derived from higher authority than this world's good, at once to regulate and sanctify the heart, you will remember, that all is at the mercy of accident; and on nothing can you rely for safety, but the goodness of divine providence, in still guarding you against temptation and shielding you from all evil. Whatever disorder you see in the world arising from violence and ungoverned passions, you may truly suppose yourselves capable of, and ask with fear and anxiety, "Lord, is it I?" unless you are prepared by habits of christian duty, previously formed,

formed, to repel the attacks of vice, and to suffer chearfully in the cause of virtue. If we embark on a wide and troubled ocean without this wisdom for our guide, and this fortitude for our defence, it is in vain to hope for safety ; we are sure of being driven from our course, bewildered and distressed, if not entirely lost.

SUCH being the difficulty and danger of a christian's warfare, let us learn to compassionate the distresses of our fellow-creatures, from whatever cause they might arise, and instead of indulging any uncharitable censure, or Pharisaical pride, " let every man, who thinks he standeth, take heed," with the meekness and humility of our Lord's disciples, " lest he fall."



S E R M O N X I .

ON UNANIMITY IN RELIGION.

ACTS iv. ³² ~~31~~.

*And the multitude of them that believed were
of one heart and one soul.*

THE words of the text express, with peculiar force, the perfect unanimity that subsisted between the primitive professors of christianity. They are no less a proof of their zeal and affection for each other. The strong and significant expression of St. Luke, that “ they were “ of one heart and one soul,” gives us the liveliest idea of friendship, harmony and love. Indeed, the perilous situation in
which

which the apostles were left, required, to render their ministry effectual, the most vigorous perseverance, the firmest attachment to the blessed truths which their heavenly Master had taught them, and above all, the utmost unanimity among themselves. Dissension might have been fatal, and luke-warm piety could have done nothing.

To whatever subject, indeed, we direct our attention; whether we consider the operations of armies, or the exertions of the legislative body, nothing great can be atchieved, and nothing valuable can be obtained, but by united endeavours and general concurrence. Nor is this spirit of unanimity less necessary to the peace and comfort of domestic life. Every one knows, how much his happiness, and perhaps his welfare would be promoted, were all about him disposed to cultivate good-fellowship, and that christian disposition which teaches us to bear with one another's infirmities. But in no case is it
more

more necessary, and in none is it more generally required, than in those who profess the religion of Christ.

IN discoursing therefore on the words of the text, I shall endeavour to shew how unanimity among christians of every denomination might, in a great degree, be promoted, and for what reasons it ought to be particularly desired.

THE first thing that I would recommend is a sincere love of religion and its interests. Had we the cause of christianity at heart, we should avoid every thing that might tend to weaken its authority, or diminish its glory. The man who from an ambition of being thought a philosopher, might have been led to form his creed different from the rest of the world ; who not content with the grand essentials of religion, has from vanity, caprice, restlessness of disposition, or any other cause, struck out something which mankind never before heard of, should not presume to disseminate
his

his peculiar tenets, unless he were well assured of their truth, and convinced not only that they would not prove injurious to the interests of christianity, but be thought necessary to eternal salvation. If by propagating his own schismatic notions, and combating the established tenets of others, there is even a probability, that instead of convincing his neighbour, he might unsettle his principles, and fill his mind with doubt and uncertainty; or, if instead of advancing the cause which he wishes to promote, he might give fresh ground for infidels to cavil, and fresh occasion for sceptics to triumph; a true love of religion would teach him to bury his opinions for ever in his own bosom, and make him dwell much rather on those truths, in which he and his fellow-christians are all unanimous, than perversely seek after subjects on which he might have an opportunity of differing from them, and standing alone. It is not sufficient that he is, or perhaps, hopes that he is, convinced himself; nor is it enough that

he is a good and conscientious man. Before he ventures to disturb the order and establishment of society, he ought to be assured that the grounds of his conviction are such, as, when explained, will give satisfaction to the minds of others. Plain, undisguised, NECESSARY truth has nothing to fear, and will always make its way in the world. The small body of christians, who first composed the primitive church, were fully convinced themselves, and their firmness, their charity, and, above all, their unanimity, fully qualified them for the conversion of the world. The glorious reformation of modern times, also, was undertaken with zeal and earnestness, and supported by palpable truth and evident justice. The struggle therefore was neither long nor difficult. In a free country, not only the cause of religion, but the dignity of human nature was concerned. The progress of truth was rapid; and superstition, bigotry, persecution and error vanished gradually before it, as the mists of the morning are dispelled by the rising sun. Since
that

that glorious period, not only religious truth, but truth of every kind, whether it relates to morals, science or government, has been cultivated with ardor and success. In christianity, more particularly, there cannot now be any truths that are necessary, or very important to be discovered. To every honest enquirer the reading of the holy gospels and the epistles will furnish ample means of "growing wise unto "salvation."

IN religion, our conduct should be such as it is with those we love. We should never be on the watch for trifles to create dissension; but satisfied with what is fundamentally right and essentially good, should be blind, or at least indifferent, to matters of no consequence. To the man who is convinced of the necessity of revelation and the truth of the gospel, religion, as an elegant writer observes, is a matter of sentiment, rather than of argument; and, as in our modes of thinking, as well as acting, we all have a something peculiar to ourselves,

ourselves, we should be ready to GRANT that liberty of conscience, which we are at all times ready to CLAIM. Unless where enthusiasm would conceal herself under the form of pure devotion, or where ignorance is so gross, and error so alarming, as to threaten the subversion of morality, and supersede the efficacy of christian duties, we should be extremely tender in combating, or in striving to unsettle the tenets of our neighbour. He who is indeed a christian, will be concerned for the interests of the gospel, and zealous for its truth. It is an object with him that wakes the most exalted passions of the soul. Whenever he directs the attention of his mind to the contemplation of its doctrines, its promises and laws, his love, his reverence, his gratitude and adoration are all engaged. As such, therefore, he cannot be indifferent when any of what he deems its truths are called in question. It wounds that sentiment which he always connects with religious worship, and gives him pain, in

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proportion

proportion as the law of God governs his conduct and influences his heart.

As a farther motive of promoting harmony and love, if not perfect unanimity, in points of faith, among christian brethren, let me recommend to you a candid and charitable disposition of mind. It is to be hoped that every disciple of our Lord possesses, at least, some share of that warm devotion and manly firmness, which distinguished the primitive apostles; and if he looks forward to the promises of the gospel as the crown and consummation of his glory, when this world shall be no more; if he reposes on the revealed word of God as a sure refuge in time of trouble; if he professes it as the support, if not the foundation of his principles, and feels its influence in governing his passions, helping his infirmities and purifying his heart, he will be as much concerned, and as much injured, if any one should dare to question the reality of his piety and its fruits, as though
his

his truth, his honor, or integrity were suspected.

BEFORE we censure, therefore, or condemn, let us charitably believe that there are many wise and good men, who agree with us in every thing that is essential, though they may have some peculiar modes of worship and punctilios of doctrine, from which they derive a degree of comfort and satisfaction, and which may superadd to their devotion a fervency, which it would otherwise, perhaps, have wanted. Some of these deviations from general custom might be ascribed to education ; some might be attributed to a singularity of character that affects NOVELTY in every thing ; and others might arise from that portion of vanity and self-love, which is lodged in every human breast, and which often tempts us to stray from the beaten track of duty. It was a rule with the apostles, but more particularly with St. Paul, never to contend about matters of this sort ; he always withdrew the attention of his dis-

ciples from every thing that might tend only to create “perverse disputings,” and directed them to the practice of the more important duties of christianity, and the belief of its more essential doctrines.

LET us not wound the conscience, then, of any weak brother, when there is no necessity for it ; but let us grant to every one that indulgence which we wish to enjoy ourselves. If we poison the smallest source of innocent comfort that may spring up occasionally in a christian’s bosom, we do him an almost irreparable injury ; especially when we consider the short duration of human life, and the large portion of it that is occupied by care, vexation, disappointment and sorrow. If from a mistaken zeal we should, by obstinate perseverance, or superior advantages, unsettle his present tenets, in which he finds sufficient satisfaction, we shall not so easily be able to establish our own in their stead. His understanding might for ever after be tainted with scepticism, and his heart rendered incapable

incapable of admitting the truths of religion, with any liveliness of faith, or performing its duties with any warmth of devotion.

HENCE it is that many who have undertaken the laudable, but unsuccessful task of conversion, have often been instrumental in spreading infidelity, while they intended only reformation and the advancement of truth. The mind, when once convicted of error in matters in which she reposed for a length of time, perhaps, with confidence and security, sometimes acquires the habit of suspecting the possibility of truth on almost every occasion, and sometimes falls into that wavering and unsettled state, which might well be compared to “ a reed shaken with the wind.”

FARTHER, let the knowledge of ourselves, as well as the true interests of religion, teach us to regard our fellow-Christians with charity, meekness and love. Where is the man who can “ retire to his chamber,

“ commune with his own heart and be
“ still,” and not find there some weaknesses
of character, some errors of conduct, and
some infirmities of temper, which he does
not wish should be viewed with an eye of
tenderness? And surely not every singularity
of disposition should be treated with harsh-
ness, nor every little deviation from the ge-
neral practice of life with severity. Where
there is solid worth and established virtue,
we might forbear to scandalize a few pecu-
liar traits of character with the contemptu-
ous appellation of folly, and to magnify
a few extravagances of the heart into
crimes. If this mutual forbearance be ne-
cessary to maintain peace and benevolence
in our daily intercourse with the world,
and every one knows it to be so, it is no
less necessary, in our occasional intercourse
with christians of every denomination.
That candid and charitable disposition of
mind, which I wish to inculcate, would
withhold us from bestowing, with indis-
criminate censure, the opprobrious epithets
of bigotry, superstition or folly on the reli-
gious

gious practice of our neighbour, whose principles might be as firm, and whose piety might be as fervent as our own, though he might somewhat differ from us in speculative tenets, exterior forms, and unavailing ceremonies.

IF, instead of cultivating this meek and amiable temper towards our brethren, we indulge a perverse spirit of wrangling and disputation on every trifling occasion, there must be an end of all unanimity. Among our most intimate and sincere friends, there will be no general and permanent concordance of sentiment or opinion, nor can we expect that there should be any, "in the household of faith, of one heart and one soul." The important interests and eternal obligations of religion, that ought always to be felt at the heart, will often be forgotten, for the fondness of engaging in "a mere battle of words," and the vanity of obtaining victory in argument. Besides, there seems to be a something highly improper, if not impious, in

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talking

talking with indecent familiarity of the dispensations of heaven ; in naming “ the “ Great and lofty One that inhabiteth “ eternity,” without a due reverence of his glory ; in making his attributes the subjects of colloquial disputation ; in examining into his essence and his nature with vain and idle curiosity, and questioning even the extent of his power.

IN religious, as well as philosophical enquiries, there are certain limits which propriety and a just sense of the human capacity will generally determine. To transgress them in the former, is to enter the mazes of scepticism and error, or to blunt that internal sentiment which connects the worship of God, and our meditations on his glory, with the most exalted emotions of the heart. To pass beyond them in the latter, is to bewilder ourselves in the fanciful regions of hypothesis, and the wide bounds of possibility. Let us not forget also, that the man who is ever ready to start the awful subject of religion as a matter

ter for argument, will certainly, in time, make it rather an exercise for his understanding, than acknowledge it as a divine law, given to us by the Lord of life, to regulate our actions, to purify our hearts from sin, and lead us into all righteousness and true holiness.

NOR are these the only ill effects to be dreaded from this abuse of our faculties. Who does not witness almost daily, "the bitterness and wrath, the anger, clamor and evil-speaking," that are occasioned by perverse and obstinate disputation on the most frivolous and uninteresting topics? If we look back on past times, we shall often find the pages of history blotted and disgraced with the memorial of horrid persecutions and cruelty to individuals, arising wholly from this evil propensity of the mind. Let us remember, also, that primitive christianity was not corrupted, till some share of prosperity had lulled its professors into a sort of indolent security, and till men arose in the church fonder of argument

gument and mystery, than of performing the practical duties of the gospel, or of adorning their profession by the salutary example of a holy life. It was amidst the jarring of contending principles and opposite opinions, that the errors of popery came to maturity; the bands of social, as well as religious union were dissolved, and in those evil days of darkness and confusion, the impostor, MAHOMET, erected the banners of his empire, on the doctrines of the KORAN.

BUT what shall we say of the mighty host of disputants that surround us now? All "fight the good fight of faith," as they would persuade themselves, but are so far from being "of one heart and one mind," that they seem industrious to find occasion for differing with each other. Contrary to the practice of those who were happy "to testify only what they knew," they are most zealous in contending for what every one, who acts ingenuously, must own he knows little, or nothing of. It
should

should seem that they either made religion an amusement for the understanding, or that they meant only to display their superior talents at the expence of others. One writes volumes to prove that the Saviour of the world, “ He who was created “ superior to Angels, and at whose name “ all things in heaven and earth were to “ bow,” was a mere MAN; or to make us believe that the human soul is only a curious machine of organized MATTER! At other times he would enlighten our minds and exalt our nature, by telling us that we are the blind and helpless agents of necessity; but if we should not comprehend this, we are informed, that liberty is necessity, and necessity liberty, and that the whole is a strife about words.

ANOTHER affirms, with equal confidence, that Jesus Christ was the only true God himself, manifested to the world in a human shape. A third wishes to inform you, how the union of the divine with the human nature was effected; and a fourth would

would make you believe that he can explain the mysteries of the Trinity to the meanest capacity.

ALL write with an air of confidence and assumed superiority, as though their respective subjects were as easy and familiar to them, as the elements of demonstrative science, and as though the rest of mankind were either fools, knaves or hypocrites. For notwithstanding their pretensions to liberality and candor, we cannot read long without hearing the tenets of others scandalized as shocking absurdities, imbibed with prejudice, maintained by interest, and supported only by power. Theirs is the only excellent and the only true way; though, as far as relates to their favourite speculations, it does not appear, that the happiness of the human race is at all concerned, to know any thing about it.

THEY seem to have but little difficulty in forming their decisions, and little doubt with regard to the propriety of endeavour-
ing

ing to subvert the establishments of society. But would they indeed be candid ; would they forget the vain, and, on these occasions, indecent parade of learning ; would they reflect on the serious evils of dissension, and prevail on themselves to forego the childish vanity of leading captive the ignorant and weak ; would they do this, and frankly own the difficulties which perplex their own minds, while they bewilder others ; we might then hope to see something more like brotherhood in the christian church ; something approaching nearer to “ the “ beauty of holiness,” and founded on that union of heart and soul which distinguished the primitive apostles. The disputers of this world would soon descend from their aerial summit to the level of common men, and like them, would be contented, at least, on such subjects, “ to know only in part.”

It is somewhat difficult for a man, who wishes to avoid the affectation of candor, as much as the charge of hostile malevolence, to know in what light he should regard

regard such teachers of christianity. We may doubt whether our Lord himself, were he again to appear on earth, would address them as he sometimes did the quibbling Scribes and ostentatious Pharisees of old, or whether, in the mildness of exhortation, he would only say, "ye do err, not knowing the scriptures." Charity certainly forbids us to suppose, that they would indulge vanity at the expence of religion, or the peace of their neighbours; but a regard to truth will not suffer us to believe, that any man of understanding can be conscious to himself of doing good, by publishing for truth, and that on the most awful subjects, what he cannot know to be such.

ON occasions like the present any attempt to penetrate the heart, and assign the true principles of conduct, would be presumptuous. We will not dwell therefore on the flattering distinction of being considered as the leader of a sect, the pride of attacking regular establishments, nor the little
ambition

ambition of pretending to see more than others, where nothing is to be seen but “as through a glass darkly;”—we will not mention these considerations, as motives for the sectarian’s conduct, because it would, perhaps, be uncharitable, and in some cases untrue: but we cannot help observing, that for a man to labor with fruitless toil from year to year on subjects which others, as wise as himself, have labored on in vain before; and which, on the very first glance, appear to lie far, very far beyond the reach of the human capacity, discovers, at least, a weakness and a vanity which, on any other subject than that of religion, would be treated with silent pity, or mortifying neglect.

HAPPY, indeed, would it be for the world, if christians considered these idle researches in their proper light; as “the
“vain jangling of men who understand
“neither what they say, nor whereof they
“affirm!” Happy would it be, if their ill-directed zeal never disturbed the honest faith

of any weak brother, nor withdrew the attention of his mind from the grand essentials of religion, to such subjects, as “minister
“ nothing but endless questions, instead of
“ godly edifying.” And were it not for the attractions of novelty, united with some share of that vanity which often makes us fond of distinction, even when distinction is only a mark of weakness, or of folly, we should regard their petty controversies, as we look back on the little strifes of children; and their zealous pursuits after superior knowledge, on subjects that can be seen only through the modest eye of christian faith, as the toils of the deluded Alchymist, in search of his precious stone, or the labors of the Physician in the pursuit of his imaginary Panacea.

LET these considerations have their due influence on our conduct and behaviour. Let them withdraw our attention from mere trifles, from exterior signs and mysterious subtilties, to the grand, essential duties of a christian. In religion there are too many
like

like those "who paid tithe of mint, anise and
" cummin," with rigorous exactness, " but
" neglected the more weighty points of the
" law, judgment, mercy and faith." Nor are
there wanting among the zealous contenders
for trifles, many of those blind guides who
will " strain at a gnat and swallow a camel."

A christian's warfare consists not in doubt-
ing and disputing, but in guarding the heart
against the encroachments of sin ; in re-
ceiving with grateful adoration, and fulfil-
ling with pious fidelity, the conditions of
eternal salvation, and in manifesting at all
times our good-will to others. There is
always more that requires to be done than to
be understood. Independent of ourselves,
many are the claims which others have to
our benevolence. Some need the warning
voice of experience to guard them from mi-
sery and ruin ; some might justly claim the
soothing comforts of friendship to mitigate
their woes ; and others might require the
hand of christian piety, to point out the
path that leads through the miseries of our

present state, to those mansions of eternal bliss, "where only true joy is to be found."

IF we hope to experience some portion of that unanimity which subsisted among the apostles, let us studiously imitate their example. If we wish to be "of one heart" and one soul," let us use the same means of acquiring that divine union which fully authorized the evangelist in the strength and energy of his expression. Examine the parables of our blessed Lord and Saviour; read with attention, the divine discourses which are scattered throughout the gospels, and you will find that every sentence was calculated to correct some religious error of consequence, to inculcate some glorious and important truth, or to rectify some absurd and uncharitable prejudice. Or, reflect on the conduct of the holy apostles in their arduous undertaking of converting Jews and Gentiles, to the gospel of Christ. Did they ever descend to trifles? Did they ever degrade their di-
vine

vine ministry by metaphysical subtilties, or unprofitable knowledge of ANY kind? On the contrary, did not the great apostle Paul, warn his son Timothy against it, in the strongest terms, and though well-versed in the learning of the age in which he lived; though eminently qualified to shine in the wrangling schools of Grecian philosophy, did he not determine to know nothing among his disciples, but "Jesus Christ and him crucified?" What were the points of doctrine which Peter and John chiefly insisted on, in the chapter from which I have taken the text, and in other parts of the apostolic history? These three, salvation by Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the body after death, and a final state of retribution to every human being in the realms of immortality. These, indeed, ought to be the grand articles of every christian's creed. These were the exalted truths which the apostles insisted on, for which they even dared to die, and which they propagated with such unanimous zeal and constancy, that they might well be said

to have been “ of one heart and one soul.” Provided we are agreed on these important doctrines, and the practical duties of christianity to which they give vigor and effect, why should we seek occasion for spreading dissension still wider, and eventually, perhaps, bring a scandal on the cross, while we mean to honor it? Why should we not in religion, as in every thing else, endeavour to fulfil the apostle’s precept, and, “ as far as it is “ possible, live peaceably with all men ?”

BUT though in matters of slight importance, or of no concern, I wish you to cultivate that charity and forbearance which are so essential to the preservation of unanimity and peace ; yet where the real interests of christianity are concerned, where the purity of its essential doctrines are in danger of being corrupted, or the heavenly sanction of its laws attempted to be done away, it is incumbent on every one who claims the dignity of being a disciple of Christ, to vindicate his profession, and in the mild and steady spirit of christian charity,

rity, be ready, at all times, to give a reasonable account "of the hope that is in him with meekness and with fear." I would have him think it as much his duty to do this, as though his honesty and truth, or any other principle which he held most dear, were called in question by the world. On such occasions, you cannot be too much aware of that shame-faced candor, and that mean, accommodating temper which are so common in the world; which are sometimes the flimsy disguise of libertinism or indifference; but oftener the poor resource of a weak and pusillanimous mind, afraid to avow its own purposes, or withheld from doing it by a false sense of modesty and decorum.

IF you are in earnest with regard to religion, if you are not from luke-warmness, or indolence, to be ranked among those, who if they examine their own hearts, might say, perhaps, with Agrippa, that they were "almost persuaded to be christians;" if you look up to the revealed

word of God as to the rock of your salvation ; if you suffer it to rule your conduct, form your principles, and direct your piety ; or if you wish to derive comfort from it in affliction, and hope that when you lie on the bed of death, “ your prayers “ and your alms will go up for a memorial before God ;” you will never suffer it to be trifled with, or abused within the sphere of your authority. In proportion as you despise the ribaldry of a *VOLTAIRE*, and the frosty scepticism of *HUME*, you will exert your influence in checking any thing that might approach to it, in your intercourse with the world. By a prudent mixture of fortitude and gentleness, much good may be done by every member of society. Where we cannot absolutely prevent evil, we may at least signify our disapprobation of it ; and not, as is too often the case, countenance obscenity and impiety by indulging a loose, disorderly merriment, at the ludicrous association of sacred with profane ideas, and by expressing a satisfaction which we do not feel, or
which,

which, at least in our serious hours, we are ashamed to acknowledge.

WITH whatever tenderness we may view the venial errors of our neighbour; how ready soever we may be to admit the claims of conscience, the force of example, and the influence of education in religious practice, we must know that vice is always wrong, and that impiety is always sinful. In this, at least, we may be unanimous, and as christians, are bound to check the growing influence of moral turpitude and corruption of manners, by every means in our power. While we are ready to guard against "the sin that doth so easily beset ourselves," let us use our utmost endeavours to secure others also against her dangerous dominion; but more particularly those who are in any respect dependent on us. This is to be done, and for the most part effectually, as far as relates to our children and domestics, by establishing fixed and regular habits of devotion, by withdrawing them from the contagion of bad

example, and by seasoning their minds with friendly admonition and wholesome reproof.

IN thus performing the grand duties which regard ourselves, our neighbour and the Deity, may we be not only unanimous, but active, earnest, and sincere. Let no perverse disputings, on vain and idle subjects, encroach upon that small portion of time which might be so much better employed; but whenever an opportunity offers of glorifying God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, or of doing good to man, by fulfilling the precepts of his ever-sacred gospel, there let us, at all times, be ready to imitate the conduct of the holy apostles, and shew the world, that we are “of one heart and one soul.”

S E R M O N XII.

ON THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

LUKE X. 33.

*But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed,
came where he was, and when he saw him
he had compassion on him.*

IT was one great object with our blessed Lord, while on earth, to establish men in social virtue, and to diffuse the sentiments of unbounded charity and benevolence throughout the world. He endeavoured in his character, as a moral teacher, to wipe away all illiberal prejudices, which men are apt to harbour against one another for difference of opinion, and always inculcated,

culcated, that no national enmity, or private resentment, ought to prevent the free exercise of humanity, or check the strong current of neighbourly love. Superior himself to the many weaknesses and imperfections that debase human nature, no injuries, however great, no hatred and malice, however virulent and unprovoked, no persecutions or afflictions, however cruel and unmerited, could excite any malevolent, or unfriendly passions in his bosom; or prevail upon him to forget that impartial kindness and affection which he shewed to all the world. His whole life, indeed, was one continued labor of love; and, in his last moments, he not only forgave those who murdered him himself, but also poured forth a prayer to his heavenly Father for them. "Father," said he, "forgive them, for they know not what they do." This universal, and unbounded principle of charity, he has labored to inculcate and establish in different parts of his holy gospel. "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you;

“ you; do good to them that hate you,
“ and pray for them that despitefully use
“ you and persecute you,” are some of
those divine precepts which are contained
in his heavenly sermon on the mount.
The epistles of St. Paul and of the other
apostles, are full of texts that will enforce
the same blessed doctrines; but it may be
unnecessary to multiply quotations from
scripture to this purpose, since the divine
spirit of christian benevolence, on which I
mean at present to discourse, is beautifully
illustrated, and admirably taught, in that
delightful parable from which the text is
taken.

It was addressed, it seems, to a certain
lawyer, who, when he enquired of our
Saviour, with no laudable intention we
are to suppose, “ what he should do to
“ inherit eternal life?” Jesus said, “ what
“ is written in the law? How readest
“ thou? And he answering, said, Thou
“ shalt love the Lord thy God with all
“ thy heart, and with all thy soul, and
“ with

“ with all thy strength, and with all thy
“ mind, and thy neighbour as thyself.
“ And he said unto him, thou hast answered right : this do, and thou shalt
“ live.” But he, “ willing to justify himself,” as St. Luke informs us, still interrogated him further by saying, “ and
“ who is my neighbour ?” Then the blessed Son of God, who never spake as man spoke, uttered the following parable, the beauty and simplicity of which cannot, in my opinion, be equalled.

“ A certain man, said he, went down
“ from Jerufalem to Jericho, and fell
“ among thieves, which stripped him of
“ his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead : And, by
“ chance, there came down a certain priest
“ that way ; and, when he saw him, he
“ passed by on the other side ; and likewise
“ a Levite, when he was at the place, came
“ and looked on him, and passed by on
“ the other side : But a certain Samaritan,
“ as he journeyed, came where he was ;
“ and

“ and when HE saw him, he had compas-
“ sion on him; and went to him, and
“ bound up his wounds, pouring in oil
“ and wine; and set him on his own
“ beast, and brought him to an inn, and
“ took care of him: And, on the mor-
“ row, when he departed, he took out
“ twopence, and gave them to the host,
“ and said unto him, take care of him, and
“ whatsoever thou spendest more, when I
“ come again, I will repay thee. Which
“ now of these three, thinkest thou, was
“ neighbour unto him that fell among the
“ thieves? And he said, he that shewed
“ mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto
“ him, go, and do thou likewise.”

THIS I think may be considered as one of the most delightful lessons of humanity that ever was delivered, for the improvement of the human heart. It is told with all that dignity and beautiful simplicity, which so eminently distinguished every thing that our blessed Saviour said or did: but, in order to see its full force, and perceive

ceive its greatest excellence, it is necessary that we should know who the Samaritans were; since more than half the merit of this good man's humane and generous behaviour towards the unfortunate Jew, depends upon the peculiar circumstances of the story. Let me, therefore, beg your attention to a short piece of history, in order to illustrate the subject.

THE earliest account we have of Samaria is in the sixteenth chapter of the first book of Kings, where we are told, that, " in
" the thirty and first year of Asa, king of
" Judah, began Omri to reign over Israel
" twelve years; and he bought the hill
" SAMARIA, of Shemer, for two talents
" of silver; and built on the hill, and
" called the name of the city which he
" built, after the name of Shemer, owner
" of the hill SAMARIA." It was in this city that King Ahab, Omri's son, and the succeeding kings of Israel, fixed their residence. From being the seat of royalty,

SAMARIA

SAMARIA became in process of time, a flourishing city; and was surrounded with fortifications sufficiently strong to repel the frequent assaults of the Syrian kings. But
“ in the twelfth year of Ahaz, king of
“ Judah, began Hoshea, the son of Elah,
“ to reign in SAMARIA over Israel, nine
“ years; and he did that which was evil
“ in the sight of the Lord, but not as
“ the kings of Israel that were before him.
“ Against him came up Shalmaneser, king
“ of Assyria; and Hoshea became his servant, and gave him presents. And the
“ king of Assyria found conspiracy in
“ Hoshea; for he had sent messengers to
“ So, king of Egypt, and brought no
“ present to the king of Assyria, as he
“ had done year by year; therefore the
“ king of Assyria shut him up, and
“ bound him in prison. Then the king
“ of Assyria came up throughout all the
“ land, and went up to SAMARIA, and
“ carried Israel away into Assyria, and
“ placed them in Halah and in Habor, by
“ the

“ the river of Gozan, and in the cities of
“ the Medes *.”

FROM this captivity the people of Israel never returned; and Shalmaneser sent tribes from various nations of the East, to take possession of the country which he had depopulated. The sacred history informs us, that they came from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and Sepharvaim. These people were consequently Heathens and Idolaters, and introduced their respective idols into the land which their sovereign had subdued. But thinking they had provoked the divine vengeance, in having neglected to worship the God of the country, they requested and obtained from their king a Jewish priest who resided at Bethel, and taught them the law of Moses, “ and how they should fear the Lord.” The idolatrous nations, however, still adhered to their favorite superstitions, and might, indeed, have received some en-

* 2 Kings xvii.

courage-

couragement from the former practices of the ten revolted tribes, who had never wholly abstained from the worship of idols. But the ministry of the Jewish priest was not altogether without effect. They were at length prevailed on to acknowledge the divine authority of the five books of Moses ; though many rejected it, and those who pretended to be profelytes, it is observable, never kept the sabbath with any strictness. The religion of the country, therefore, was a mixture of Judaism and idolatry.

THESE Eastern adventurers had now for more than two centuries inhabited their new settlements, when the people of Judah returned from the Babylonish captivity, furnished, by the liberality of Cyrus, with a commission to rebuild their temple, and presented with all the massy plate of gold and silver which Nebuchadnezzar had taken, to adorn it. The Samaritans, it appears, regarded the Jews on their return with an eye of jealousy, and treated their attempt to rebuild the temple with scorn and deri-

sion. Nor is it to be supposed that the people of Judah, who had long been taught to consider Samaria as the seat of civil slaughter, heresy and schism, were more inclined to cultivate peace than their idolatrous neighbours. This mutual disposition to enmity was increased by a variety of causes. They irritated the Jews by confidently asserting, that they were in possession of the true and genuine copy of the Pentateuch. They were further odious to them, because they still united the gross and impure rites of their idolatry, with the worship of the one true God, as taught by Moses. Besides, their behaviour to the Jews on their return from captivity was, it must be owned, treacherous and base; for under the mask of friendship, and a pretence of assisting them in rebuilding their temple, they at first indulged a hope of preventing, or at least of interrupting, the further prosecution of the work; and when they found that this insidious conduct did not succeed, they accused the Jews of rebellion to Artaxerxes, who

who issued an order for putting a stop to the building.

IN the second year of the reign of Darius, king of Persia, the undertaking however was renewed, and carried on with increasing zeal and alacrity. When the walls were erected, the animosity of the Samaritans broke out again in expressions of virulence and contempt. Nor did they stop here, but proceeded to open violence; for Nehemiah relates that, “when Sanballat and
“Tobiah heard that the walls of Jerusa-
“lem were made up, and that the breaches
“began to be stopped, they were very
“wroth, and conspired together with others
“to come and to fight against Jerusalem,
“and to hinder it.”

WE learn also that Nehemiah, who, in conjunction with Ezra, was appointed to carry on the building, and to re-establish the Jews in their religious worship, turned out Manasseh, the son * of Joiada, and the

* Josephus asserts, that he was brother of Jaddus the high priest.

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grandson

grandson of Eliashib, the high-priest, because he had married Nicasa, the daughter of Sanballat the Chuthite, who governed Samaria, during the reign of Darius; and farther, perhaps, because this Sanballat was the man who had been so active in opposing and distressing the Jews, in the prosecution of their pious undertaking.

AFTER Manasseh was thus excommunicated, his father petitioned Alexander the Great, who had just then obtained his signal victory over the unfortunate Darius, for leave to build a temple, like that at Jerusalem, upon Mount Gerizim, which was near Samaria. The king condescended to grant his request; the temple was built, and his son, Manasseh, appointed the high priest of it. The consequence was, that those Jews, who were excluded from the temple at Jerusalem, for any violation of their laws, such as profaning the sabbath, eating unclean meats, and other enormities, found a refuge here. Particularly, as Josephus relates, many priests and other Israelites, who

who had married strange women, were admitted into the temple on Mount Gerizim, and suffered to exercise the peculiar religion of their country, under the countenance, and protection of Manasseh, the high priest; who was strenuously supported by the wealth and power of his father-in-law. This gave great offence to the Jews, as it served, in some measure, to destroy the force of their laws; for the dread of offence became less violent, of course, when the delinquents knew how to evade the punishment.

THE breach between the two people was made still wider, by the letter which the Samaritans presented to Antiochus Epiphanes; who had just before persecuted the Jews with the most brutal cruelty, on account of their religion, and who, not contented with having plundered their temple, had wantonly polluted their altars. This letter, or petition, was replete with meanness, falsehood and hypocrisy. It began with the most abject flattery, and with an impious prostitution of language, was ad-

addressed "TO ANTIOCHUS EPIPHANES, THE
"ILLUSTRIOUS GOD!" It expressly declared, that the Samaritans had no connection with the Jews, and that their origin and religious customs were different; it stated, that they had been led, partly through their misfortunes, and partly through a regard to an ancient superstition, to join the Jews in celebrating a festival, which they called the sabbath; it then set forth, that Antiochus had justly punished those abandoned people, called the Jews; and after asserting that they had built a temple on Mount Gerizim, in which they performed sacrifice, but which had hitherto the name of no God, concluded with begging that it might be dedicated to the GRECIAN JUPITER.

SAMARIA, as we have observed, after the captivity of the ten tribes, was peopled by wanderers of various nations that emigrated from the East, and were originally idolaters; but as they must have mixed with many of the people of Israel, on their taking possession of the country, and
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as great numbers in succeeding ages, for the reasons we have above mentioned, were continually flocking to them, because they had a temple on Mount Gerizim to go to, in which the law of Moses was read publickly, and the Jewish ceremonies, I suppose, duly performed, the whole country, in process of time, approached very nearly to that form of worship, which was prescribed in the scripture by God to the Jews. But this did not at all serve to reconcile them to their offended neighbours, or mitigate, in the least, that enmity which was between them. For the inveterate hatred which the Jews conceived against them originally, from the opposition which was made against them by Sanballat, while they were rebuilding their temple, had been so exceedingly exasperated and increased, from time to time, on account of the shelter which they afforded to the rebellious and excommunicated Jews, that they denounced the heaviest curse against them they possibly could. It cut off all kind of intercourse and communication with them ;

it declared all the fruits, both of their land and cattle unclean ; it precluded every possibility of their becoming profelytes, and endeavoured to destroy, as far as possible, their hopes of the resurrection, and eternal life.

THERE are two or three passages in St. John's gospel, that will serve to confirm this account of the enmity which subsisted between the Jews and the Samaritans. He tells us, " our blessed Lord being wearied
" with his journey, sat down on Jacob's
" Well, and a woman of Samaria came
" there to draw water ; and he said unto
" her, Give me to drink ; but she answered,
" how is it that thou, being a Jew, askest
" drink of me, who am a woman of Samaria ? for (rejoins the holy evangelist) the
" Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." Rancorous, indeed, must have been that national hatred, which could make her hesitate to give a weary and thirsty traveller a draught of water ; and that it was so, we may learn from another circumstance ; for when the Jews meant to cast the
severest

severest and most ignominious reproach on our Saviour, they exclaimed, in the bitterness of malice, "Thou art a SAMARITAN, " and hast a devil." In confirmation of the above, we may also quote the virulent expression of the son of Sirach, "two " nations my foul hateth, the SAMARITANS and the Philistines."

HAVING entered into this necessary explanation, let us now review the story. We find the Priest and the Levite, who, though they were his countrymen, when they saw him, uncharitably "passed by on " the other side." But the good Samaritan, though he was one of those people whom the Jews utterly detested and abhorred, had compassion on him, bound up his wounds, set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, where he had him taken care of at his own expence. Not all the national hatred, which the Jews on every occasion, so disgracefully exercised against his fellow-countrymen, nor that bitter curse which had been denounced against them in the full

full rancour of malice and revenge, could repress the kind emotions of pity and compassion, or make him forget those offices of common humanity, which were due to him, as a citizen of the world, and which he rightly judged every good man was bound to perform. This, as our blessed Redeemer infers, is the duty of a neighbour. But, with what gentleness and delicacy has he censured, or rather complained of the neglect of this great duty among the Jews, by representing, in this beautiful parable, one of their Priests and Levites as passing by, without attending to the misfortune and distress of one of their own brethren, who would have perished by the way's side, perhaps, had not the principles of true charity and benevolence brought an enemy to his assistance; a man who was ever ready to stretch out his hand to the unfortunate wherever he found them; one whose sense of virtue was superior to the mean and malignant spirit of revenge, and who therefore could extend his bounty even to his enemies!

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BUT let us not suppose this admirable lesson of social love and duty, was intended for the particular purpose only of reproaching the Jews, or of answering his vain enquiry who gave rise to it. The precepts of christianity were meant for all mankind to profit by, and to extend salvation to the end of the world. I wish I could be justified in saying, that mankind at large had profited by this blessed advice of our Lord and Saviour, which is the subject of our present consideration, and, influenced by his example, had opened their hearts to the gentle sentiments of charity and love. But, if we look abroad into the world, we shall often find that the most trifling difference among men, whether in religion, politics, or even in matters of idle speculation, will not only check the exercise of every friendly and benevolent work, but kindle also the malignant passions of persecution, hatred and revenge. Indeed, we shall not, I presume, be thought to transgress the bounds of truth, when we affirm, that there do not exist between man

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and man, who may be supposed to live in society, without pique or prejudice, envy or dispute, those sentiments of mutual benevolence, that readiness and pleasure to lend such assistance to another, in the hour of misfortune and adversity, as religion hath enjoined, and the laws of social virtue always have required.

YET, while the practice of the world affords but too just ground to warrant these general assertions, let it be our peculiar glory that this country stands unrivalled, by surrounding nations, in charitable and humane institutions; in those benevolent plans of every description which are formed for the relief and protection of the wretched. It was from the same liberal spirit also, that those public bodies were incorporated, by which commerce has been so effectually enlarged, and an intercourse opened between the most distant nations; by which the various states of human society have been made familiar to us, the blessings of religion extended, and civilization

tion wonderfully promoted. Such are the glorious effects of charity, public spirit and extensive benevolence; and such, I trust, are the virtues that will distinguish us, among our co-temporary citizens of the world, even to the latest posterity.

LET us study, as far as we are individually concerned, to maintain this illustrious character, by embracing every opportunity of doing good, and rendering ourselves useful to mankind. Not to mention those rewards which religion bestows, and those superior gratifications which the exercise of good works always afford, one might suppose, indeed, that even a regard to ourselves would dispose us to imitate, at an humble distance, those heavenly examples of divine love which our blessed Lord throughout his whole life exhibited. For where is that man who, though he refuses assistance to another in the trying hour of sorrow and calamity, would not himself be glad to look up to those above him for protection and relief, should providence

vidence ever throw him into the same hard condition? And where is he, however great his possessions, however high his station, who can ensure stability to his affairs, or guard against the many vicissitudes of fortune? Let us remember that Job, "the greatest of all the men of the East," was, in a very short time, deprived of all, and reduced to the lowest ebb of wretchedness and misery. The histories of the world will furnish us with many examples of men, who have been kings or emperors to-day, and slaves or beggars to-morrow. Those who one day have exercised oppressive cruelty over their fellow-creatures, have been the next obliged to submit to the yoke themselves, and relied for safety and protection upon that clemency which they forgot to practise. The exercise of christian benevolence, therefore, is both prudence and a duty which we owe ourselves, as well as the dictates of religion and virtue.

BUT this great duty is not to be confined within the narrow bounds of partial friendship

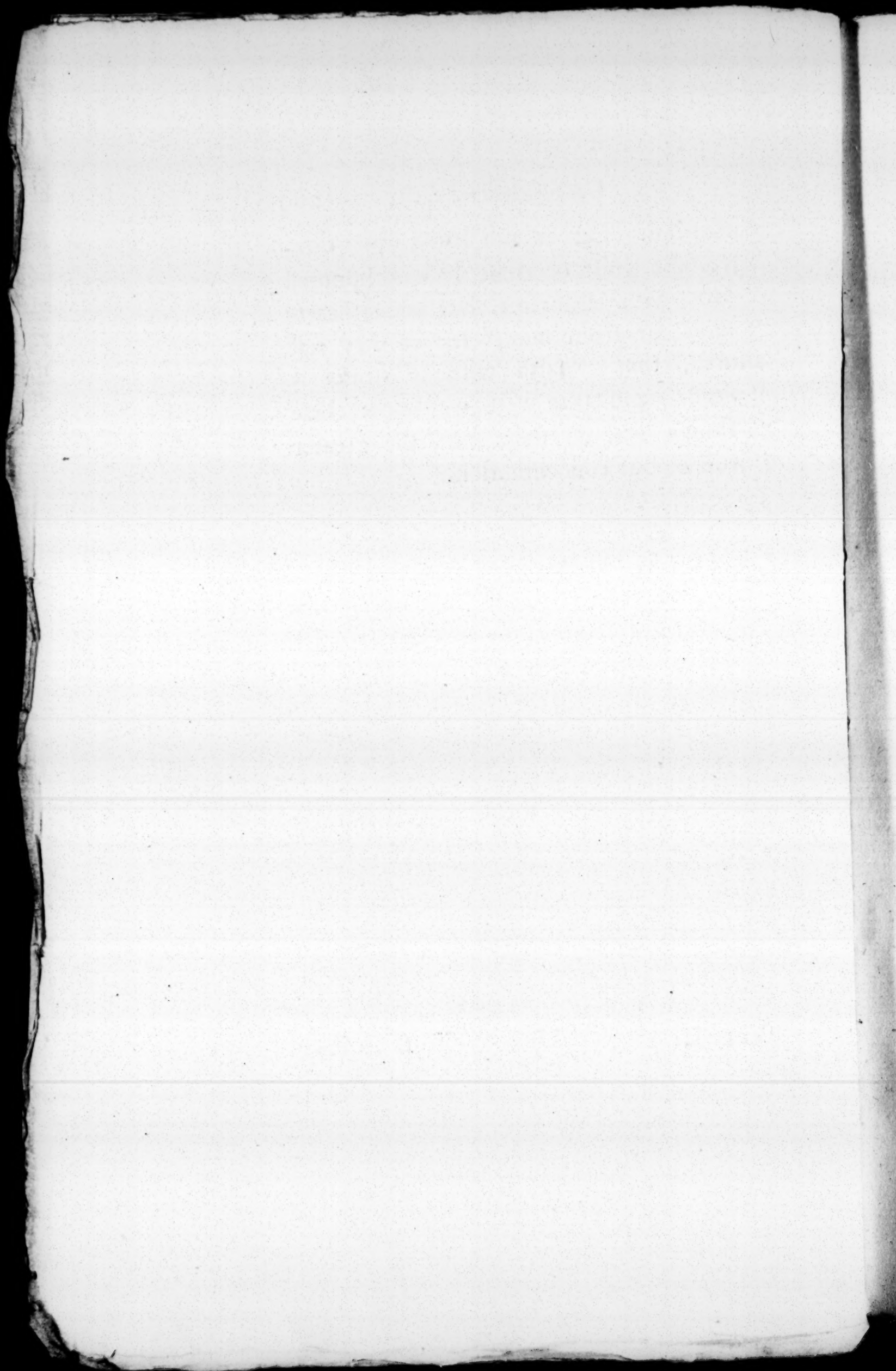
ship or national regard. It should be as diffusive as the good Samaritan's was ; it should extend to the meanest wretch in creation, and relieve misfortune wherever it may be found ; nor should it stop here ; its benignant influence should reach even to our enemies ; it should be as unconfin'd as the bright sun-beams that animate the world, and, with regard to national distinctions, as regardless of its object as the fruitful dews of heaven. " For," says our blessed Redeemer, " if ye love them " which love you, what reward have you ? " Do not even the publicans the same ? " Be ye therefore perfect," he adds, " even " as your Father which is in heaven is " perfect."

LET us all endeavour to profit by these his divine precepts, and let our lives shew that he has not died to establish them for us in vain. Fortune, it is true, seldom affords us an opportunity of performing acts of kindness that are extensively useful, and
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we may pass through life, perhaps, without ever having such an object as the unfortunate Jew presented to our notice. We are not, therefore, to wait for any extraordinary occasion to shew our duty towards our neighbour, but rather cultivate at all times that charitable disposition, which it is evident the good Samaritan possessed, and which extends not only to the duties, but the decencies of life; which constantly displays itself in the exercise of many little endearing offices of courtesy and kindness, and which contributes much more to domestic happiness and comfort, than a mind satisfied with being casually generous, and fond only of splendid actions of benevolence.

LET us then, next to the worshipping of the everlasting Father, in all righteousness and true holiness, be ever ready to cultivate and promote the happiness and welfare of our fellow-creatures, by imitating the virtues and example of the good Samaritan.

Samaritan. Let us not bring upon ourselves the guilt of those, "who honored God with their lips, but whose hearts were far from him;" for we may rest assured, that "faith without works is dead," and that "if we know these things, and do them not, the greater will be our condemnation."



S E R M O N XIII.

O N D E A T H.

M A T. XXV. 13.

Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh.

MAN, in the earliest ages of the world, when communities first began to be established, must have found many inducements to the practice of virtue from the necessary conditions of humanity, and the involuntary reflections of his own mind. The many eventual evils to which human life is continually exposed, were almost sufficient, of themselves, to teach a ra-

tional creature the great duties which he owed society. Without calling in the aid of religion, or insisting on the existence of a moral principle in the human heart, which invariably dictates the pursuit of virtue, and as invariably opposes the practice of vice, we might trace the social duties to another source; that of self-love. Men could see their friends and neighbours at all times, and in all places, afflicted with diseases, or harrassed with distresses of various kinds. They could perceive, that no situation was secure from danger, or free from those evils which threaten us from within and from without. When, therefore, they saw some pining in poverty, others smitten with anguish, or laboring under the afflictions of providence, what could awaken pity more, or lay a stronger claim to their beneficence, than the painful reflection, that every one was subject to the like calamities, and that the revolution of a day might bring them over their heads!

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HENCE the tear of compassion has flowed, and from this prevailing motive, which springs in every bosom, the heart of charity has been warmed, when religion's voice was silent, or regarded without reverence, and the will of the Deity but imperfectly known. Hence it was that men established the fundamental maxims of virtue, and first of all, perhaps, saw the reasonableness, and felt the justice of "doing unto others, as we would that they should do unto us."

BUT this consideration, however universal, was insufficient to confirm men in the practice of virtue, or govern their conduct with that steadiness, which ought to accompany every moral influence. We are creatures too imperfect to be strictly engaged to our duty by many motives; much less was it to be expected from one only. We are constantly deceiving ourselves by hope or fear, and becoming dupes to the pride and vanity of our own hearts. We are too elated with confidence, in the day

of prosperity, to suffer eventual evil to disturb our felicity, and, by the same constitution of the mind, too much depressed in adversity, either to bear the ills of life with fortitude, or look forward with the eye of faith to prospects of future comfort.

OTHER principles of action were necessary therefore for beings subject to such weakness and imperfection. Hope, and that vain idea of security which always attends prosperity, while it taught men to reject the intrusions of future evil, oftentimes suppressed pity, and checked the exercise of common humanity. The truth is, we are not to be governed by casualties. The passions cannot be regulated, nor the will controuled, but by such principles as are, in themselves, fixed and determinate.

FOR this purpose the Almighty hath revealed his will to us, through his only-begotten Son, and established certain laws, which are alone to be considered as the criterion of human actions, and our only
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sure guide to piety and virtue. These laws will be found, by every one who rightly considers them, wonderfully adapted to improve our nature, and promote the happiness of the world. Nor has the great Author of our being been less solicitous to shew us the necessity of our constant obedience to them, than he was at first to establish them. They are enforced in the strongest manner by many considerations that must, at times, of necessity arise in every one's mind. The limits of a discourse oblige me to confine myself to one only, and that, indeed, is what the words of the text in some measure require. I mean the awful consideration of DEATH and FUTURITY.

THAT there is to be another state of existence for all human beings, in which they will be either happy, or miserable, according to their actions while in this life, and that the soul of man can never die, are the grand outlines of every religion. However good men may sometimes differ

among themselves with respect to modes of worship ; however anxious every one may be to settle his tenets of belief, and pay his religious homage to the Father of all mercies, in that manner which seems most agreeable to his understanding and his conscience, the great object of all is the happiness of another world. Without this persuasion, there could be no motive to worship the Deity beyond what the immediate fear of his power created ; nor any security for virtue beyond what self-interest and self-love afforded. Man, indeed, soon saw the necessity of a future state, in order to reconcile the dispensations of providence with the divine attributes. The pious soon learned to hope for it, and the wicked were soon taught to dread it. The end of revelation was to propose it to all mankind for their belief, and fully to disclose that glorious light which the eye of reason, after all its exertion, could but faintly perceive.

I NEED not tell you with what disinterested love and unbounded charity to all the world

world the Christian Revelation was established, nor would I repeat the great moral condition on which it confers happiness, but to remind you of its consistency with human reason in that universal maxim of social duty which I have already noticed. "Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you," is the law and the prophets, our Lord tells us, as well as the dictates of the human mind ; with this all-powerful motive added to it, that the one has the prospect of eternal happiness to enforce its observance, and the other little more than convenience, and the fortuitous gratifications of self-love.

Yes, the religion of Christ has something more noble and exalted for its object than the happiness of this world. The blessings and rewards of the pious are lodged in futurity ; nor are they subject to any of those contingencies which vex human life with sorrow and disappointment, but extend to all eternity invariably perfect. These rewards however
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are not to be enjoyed without death. The dark and melancholy regions of the grave must be passed, before we can indulge the hope of mixing "with the spirits of just men made perfect." Such is the condition of humanity, such, we know, is the will of heaven. While then we pass the few years allotted for our existence here, what can so effectually serve to keep us in the constant observance of our duty, as the contemplation of that awful period which closes the scene of human life, and opens the boundless prospect of eternity? All other motives to piety and goodness, when compared with this, seem weak and ineffectual.

It is true, we may relieve a fellow-creature in distress from a supposition that chance or providence may throw ourselves into the same wretched condition; or we might occasionally yield to the emotions of pity, and gratify a passion that springs from some secret, or uncertain source. This, however, is duty that rests on a very unsettled foundation; for while the strange vicissitudes

vicissitudes of human affairs afford us a probability that we shall never know the miseries of poverty, or need the beneficence of others, we shall only practise the social virtues from a principle that fluctuates with the involuntary impulses of the heart; that exists to-day and not to-morrow, and is, perhaps, as uncertain as the weather or the winds. But DEATH is certain; make this the great motive of living well, and you act from a principle that never varies. Here is no admission for the delusions of fancy, nor the many partial representations of vanity and self-love. "It is appointed unto all men once to die, and after that the judgment." Were it to happen to a thousand and one only escape, there would be some ground for human folly to practise self-delusion. But since all must die, since the body must soon return to dust, and the spirit to the God who gave it, this ought surely to make us constant in the uniform discharge of every social and religious duty. What ought to keep us always on our guard too,
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and never suffer us to lose sight of futurity, is the awful consideration, that
“ we know neither the day nor the hour
“ wherein the Son of Man will come to
“ judge us.”

THE famous Athenian philosopher, unassisted by divine revelation, could ask what else deserved a wise man's serious consideration, but death and the future state of existence allotted to human beings? From frequent meditation on a subject so awful and sublime, we might hope, indeed, that, under the influence of divine grace, every thing excellent in piety and beautiful in morals would proceed. In endeavouring to enforce this, as the great principle of action, I can urge no more than the most ignorant knows. Do you believe there is a just God? A Being who will punish wickedness and reward virtue? Satisfy yourselves on this head, and the consideration of DEATH as a motive of living well, will appear, in all its force, to the most illiterate, as well as to the most enlightened mind.

mind. We know that we are drawing near to that period which is to put an end to all our pursuits, and render us "dead" to the things of this world;" when it will be too late for repentance, and when remorse for past crimes, instead of producing amendment, will only excite despair; the anguish of a rebuking spirit, that always warned us of "a certain fearful looking-for of judgment," and bade us, instead of running on with heedless joy in the vain circle of worldly pleasures, "Watch and pray lest we enter into temptation, redeeming the time because the days are evil."

WERE I to describe the impressions which the thoughts of death must make on the human mind, in those pious moments, when, in obedience to the word of God, we commune with our own hearts, I could present no images, perhaps, but what are familiar to every man's bosom. The misfortune only is that they have not been permanent; never thought of, or attended

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to but for the present hour, nor had any uniform influence on the government of the heart. Who is there that has not his fears sometimes alarmed, and his sensibility sufficiently awakened, to make the impression of death and futurity durable enough to follow him into his retirements, keep him on his guard, and excite in his bosom the calm and steady spirit of devotion? Is not the dreadful uncertainty of life sufficient to make us call on our God, and pray for the intercession of a Saviour, whenever we lay ourselves on the pillow of rest, and whenever we wake once more to view the rising sun? When we go to the house of mourning, feel the languid pulse, and see the sure approach of death; when we hear the faltering voice of friendship speak his dying, last farewell, and watch the parting anguish of a spirit, that is about to take its anxious and uncertain flight for ever and for ever; who is there that does not hear, or seem to hear “the still, small voice” of conscience whisper to him thus; “It is thy lot next, perhaps, therefore prepare—

“pare—how many years are lost! Time
“flies with swift and silent step—be resolute and fixed before it is too late—nature calls thee hence, religion bids thee watch; for thou knowest not the day nor the hour of thy departing.”

IF we consult experience, we shall find that such thoughts have been often intruded on our minds; and we need only attend to the corresponding emotions which they excited for the moment to learn our duty. It is, indeed, a mark of divine wisdom, which we cannot sufficiently admire, that the great motives of action are rendered equally evident to all; and men do not need so much to be TAUGHT their duty, as to be REMINDED of it. The ancients were so fully convinced of the plainness of the arguments which DEATH offered every man to husband his time to the best advantage, and lead a life of piety and virtue, that they seem to have thought the remembrance of it sufficient; and, indeed, “REMEMBER DEATH,” might be regarded as one
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of the wisest precepts they have to boast of.

BUT as objects in contemplation will never affect the mind like those that are present, we should do well to make the frequent and successive loss of our friends, new inducements to the faithful discharge of our duty, and the effectual remembrance of our uncertain state. So precarious is the life of man, so many are continually dropping around us, some quick as the shock that strikes from heaven, others, again, sinking into the grave by slow and gradual decay, that no one, I trust, will ever want a MEMENTO of this sort to teach him how to die. The awful minister of heaven visits us at all seasons, in every varied shape. Seldom does a year pass over our heads, but the death of some one who contributed either to our happiness, our interest, or pleasures, bids us remember, and watch for ourselves.

SHOULD

SHOULD any of us still be disposed to linger away life in forgetful security, deaf to such powerful calls, let us reflect that not an hour is our own ; that the dispensations of fate are in Almighty hands, and that some one, attached to us by the dearest ties, might be the next sad argument to remind us of our duty, perhaps, and tell us that we, too, soon must die.

I HAVE only to add my earnest wish, that the awful subject itself of this day's contemplation might have its due influence on your minds. It is a subject in which every human being is interested ; and which, to use the words of a great philosopher, " comes home to every man's business and bosom." Let not the thought of futurity, then, which will soon be the object of all our concern, pass by us unheeded as the slumbers of the morning ; but let it, if possible, produce a conduct steady and constant, as the principle from which it ought to spring.

It is the property only of weak or guilty minds to be occasionally alarmed at accidents, and frightened for a moment into a sense of duty. A rational man duly reflects on the conditions of humanity, and sees the necessity of living agreeably to them. Melancholy experience convinces him, that eternity might be suspended on a moment; and this will keep him ever on his guard, lest that fatal moment might chance to be spent in riotous and profane pleasure, or in the transgression of some sacred command. Let him who has hitherto neglected this call to vigilance in the discharge of his duty, henceforth listen to the heavenly voice of his blessed Lord and Saviour with greater reverence. Let the divine precept of the text live in his bosom, amidst all the occupations of a busy world, as well as accompany him in the hours of solitary leisure and retirement. This will teach him to regard *DEATH*, not as an object that excites either grief or terror, but as the means by which the all-gracious Father calls good men, through the mediation

diation of Christ Jesus, into a better state of existence, that he might distinguish them with further marks of his divine favor and protection, in those regions of immortal bliss, “where only true joy is to be found.”

IF the considerations which have been suggested to you carry any weight, if they produce any effect, let it not, for heaven's sake, be the involuntary impression of a moment; but let it sink deep into the heart. Not that it is to fright us from the moderate and chearful enjoyments of life, or cast over our minds the gloom of superstitious fear; but that it might become a settled and habitual principle of action, nor ever fail to guide us in our duty towards our neighbour and our God; a principle that might regulate all our affections, and teach us to practise the mild virtues of christianity, with the meek and humble spirit that animates the gospel; a principle that might enable us to “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

No one has a moment to lose or trifle away in idle inactivity. The longer we live the nearer are we drawing to that awful period which wafts us into eternity. Nothing can retard our progress; sleeping or awake, on we journey to the place of our appointed rest; where the world and all its pleasures will interest us no more than the toys that pleased our infancy, and the soul will look forward with anxious terror only to that tremendous scene which lies beyond the grave. In the trying hour of our departure from this world, nothing can support us but the consciousness of virtue, and the heavenly hope that results from the practice of true religion; religion, that may give us some claim to eternal salvation, from an humble confidence, that
“ we have done justice, loved mercy, and
“ walked humbly with our God.”

S E R-

S E R M O N XIV.

ON THE GOVERNMENT OF THE TEMPER.

P R O V. xvi. 32.

He that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty : and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city.

TH E farther we carry our researches into the nature of moral and religious duty, the more fully shall we be convinced of the importance of an early discipline over the passions, and a steady attention to the government of our conduct. Not only those propensities, which are in themselves evil, require the constant restraint of reason and religion ; but even

such principles as are founded in benevolence, and spring from the most amiable dispositions, often need the warning voice of prudence to check their ardor, lest they might exceed the stated limits of virtue; and, instead of producing happiness to ourselves and others, prove only the source of misery and disappointment.

SUCH, indeed, are the frailties and imperfections of Man, that even his virtues are often blended with corresponding vices, and always united with errors congenial to them. But so wide is the dominion of sin, and so common is the depravity of the human heart, that, previous to the cultivation of GOOD dispositions, is the duty of guarding against EVIL ones. We cannot hope that the good seed will thrive and bring forth fruit an hundred-fold, until the ground has been cleansed of the thorns and briars that would choak it; and before we can expect to enjoy that gracious light which is from above, we must, to use the beautiful and expressive

expressive language of scripture, become, if possible, "as a little child."

THE writer who attempts to develop with truth and candor the frailties and imperfections, the vices and corruptions of the human heart, is rather embarrassed by the variety of subjects that present themselves to his contemplation. A wild, luxuriant field lies before him, and the understanding is abundantly employed in selecting, out of an almost infinite and disordered number, a few distinguished plants that are worth our care and cultivation, or in rooting out some of those noxious weeds, which like the tares among the wheat, should be gathered into bundles in order to be burnt and destroyed.

THE particular evil to which I wish at present to direct your attention, and which in every season of life, but more particularly in youth, cannot be too carefully guarded against, is what self-love, I know, would be content to call a foible, or a mere

natural infirmity ; but which, I fear, religion will always associate with vice, and condemn as sinful. I mean a peevish temper, and an irritable disposition ; which I shall consider, as the source of continual unhappiness to ourselves and others ; and as incompatible with that frame of mind which Christianity teaches and requires us to cultivate.

THE ills and vexations of life are of themselves sufficiently numerous, without cherishing such dispositions in our own bosoms, as are calculated to give them additional violence. The best tempers will sometimes be ruffled, and the highest sense of personal dignity, united to the utmost efforts of a cultivated mind, are not always sufficient to guard us against the encroachments of violent passions, and those debasing circumstances of conduct, which are almost inseparable from them. But these effects seldom happen. Life does not abound with such extraordinary events as might often kindle the transports of any passion,

passion, whether anger, grief, joy or resentment in the bosom of a Christian. The tenor of the Gospel teaches him to view the various appearances of this world, with calmness and moderation. The follies of mankind will chiefly excite his pity, and their errors his forbearance. Instead of being transported with rage against those whose sentiments, or, perhaps, whose prejudices differ from his own, he will be ready to grant that independent conduct and liberty of thought to others which he claims himself, and will at all times be disposed to judge with candor and moderation.

How very different is the picture of a passionate man's mind and conduct! Every trifling event that suits not exactly with his peculiar mode of thinking, that crosses his exorbitant wishes, or that seems to thwart his fancied pleasures, is magnified into a real evil, and for the moment makes him wretched. The happiness of others, indeed, may be occasionally annoyed, by
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the idle agitations of his mind, but in general, he is himself the principal sufferer. And it is a proof both of the wisdom and goodness of Providence, that no inconsiderable degree of misery is invariably connected with the indulgence of every evil propensity of nature. No one ever harboured in his bosom the gloomy passions of anger, hatred and revenge, without feeling a pang that corroded his own heart, while he wished to disturb the peace of others. But, on the contrary, the exercise of every benevolent affection is invariably accompanied with the most pleasing emotions, and the most delightful satisfaction.

WE may carry the same mode of reasoning farther, and remark, that with every vicious indulgence, there is always some corresponding curse, or misery, by way of punishment, annexed. The intemperate man, as well as the libertine, are undermining their health (without which no blessing can be enjoyed) while they are
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in the pursuit of vicious pleasures. He too, who, in toiling after riches and honors, has trampled under foot every law, both human and divine, feels at length in the hour of imperfect enjoyment, all his happiness embittered by the remorse of conscience, and the general contempt, perhaps, of the more virtuous part of mankind.

THE experience of repeated hours of vexation and sorrow, which sprung wholly from internal disorder and irritable passions, has led some, from mere SELF-LOVE, at a more advanced season of life, to enure their minds to discipline, and taught them the advantage and necessity of "keeping the heart with all diligence." It were to be wished that we could learn from reflection and the precepts of religion, those truths which a few only have gained, after years, perhaps, of pain and sorrow. Consider, are the few scanty hours of comfort and satisfaction which this world affords, to be trifled with? Should they be continually

continually embittered, and sometimes destroyed, for want of cultivating such dispositions as are necessary to teach us their true nature and proper value? We are not here to expect perfection. We must sometimes bear with the weakness, and even the folly of our neighbour, if we wish our conversation with the world to be blameless, and the intercourses of domestic life to be productive of peace. Not every trifling injury should kindle the spark of anger in our hearts, or make us eager to "drink at the waters of strife." Besides, when we are influenced by passion, we are under the greatest and most dangerous delusion. Circumstances and events present themselves to the mind, as objects appear to the eye through a mist, indistinctly, and beyond their real magnitude. We often feel the painful emotions of resentment when no insult or affront was offered, and are sometimes in danger of harbouring the malice of enmity against those, who, though they might have wounded our pride, or inadvertently roused our anger, are notwithstanding

standing ready, at all times, to perform the duties of a neighbour, and the kind offices of a friend.

SUCH indeed are the effects of an irascible temper, that the dearest blessings and the most rational satisfactions which this life can afford, are often lost by it. The ties of friendship, the few pleasures that result from our intercourse with the world, and the endearing comforts of relationship, which are, at best, but of a frail and uncertain nature, are rendered doubly so to the man of a passionate and irritable disposition. His friendships can be but few; and those few will be of a doubtful and suspicious kind. Such, possibly, as are formed from interested motives only; or such as appear under the cold form of ceremony and distant respect. Men of independent minds, who are capable of forming, and maintaining such connections with the good and virtuous, as are productive of the greatest felicity, are not
willing

willing to subject themselves to the capricious anger of a wild and uncultivated mind, and therefore turn from it with indifference, if not contempt.

THE best and happiest of mortals find that vexations and disappointments, sorrows and calamities, are scattered in sufficient abundance through the paths of life, without sharing the pain and misery, which spring only from internal disorder, misgovernment and folly. But though we, as citizens of the world, may shrink from a man of this unhappy frame, wherever we meet him ; or only keep up that sort of formal and occasional intercourse with him, which is well enough adapted for carrying on the business of life ; but which, by no means, implies the intimacy or confidence of friendship ; yet those whom nature has made his dependents, and others who are forced to mingle with him in the small circle of domestic life, may well excite our pity. To the capricious rage
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and violence of ungoverned passions, in superiors, many may ascribe the sum of their misery. However careful they might be to discipline their own minds, and cultivate happiness by prudent conduct and integrity of heart, they cannot live secure against the wild and unprovoked attacks of anger, or the petty vexations of peevishness.

FARTHER, those who are contented to live under the loose dominion of the passions, must be in constant fear of saying or doing something to-day, which they may be truly ashamed of to-morrow. Short experience will teach them, that in the evil moments of anger and resentment, they have exposed themselves to derision and contempt, if not to infamy and disgrace for ever. Sorrow and confusion, shame and remorse, will be the invariable consequences of an irascible disposition, in which all sense of virtue is not yet extinct ; and where this is not the case, we can expect to find nothing but
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confirmed habits of brutality ; the fierceness of a savage, without his fondness, or instinctive affection.

BUT though pain and sorrow are the natural effects of internal disorder and misrule, yet they are not the only evils which hourly threaten the man whose mind is ready, on every trivial occasion, to burn with anger, and kindle into resentment. He may justly apprehend more dreadful consequences. He is in danger of every species of injustice, and every degree of guilt. The temper to evil is cherished within his own breast. While men in general are only exposed to casual temptation and eventual evil, the passionate man cannot mix in society without being in danger every hour. And if we may justly estimate the turpitude of any vice, or propensity to evil, from its effects, we must ascribe a large portion of guilt to the unlimited indulgence of anger : for let us consider it in its consequences, and the history of the world will inform us, that
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it has not only been productive of repeated misery to individuals, and, perhaps, to whole families ; but has often incurred the punishment of the law, for acts of violence and oppression, and frequently led to the foul crimes of treason, rebellion, and even murder.

WHILE these observations may be applied to all ages and conditions of life, let it be remembered, that every passion derives additional force from the ardor of youth ; and that the warmth of temper, which is so common at this early period of life, and which often proves the source of anger and resentment, if not timely corrected by the mild influence of religious principles, will probably, in old age, settle into gloomy malignity, or splenetic and habitual rage ; dispositions that must corrupt the source of every virtue, and render our services to God unacceptable and vain.

THIS leads me to consider, that irascibility of temper, and peevishness of disposition, which I have made the subject of our present meditation, in the last and most important point of view ; as incompatible with the duties of a Christian, and that frame of mind which our blessed Redeemer taught us to cultivate.

THE birth of our heavenly Lord was celebrated by the Song of Angels, who announced “ Peace on earth, good-will “ towards man ;” and, on the eve of his departure from a wicked and degenerate world, this was part of the last and affectionate blessing which he bestowed on his few faithful followers ; “ Peace I leave “ with you, my peace I give unto you.” This was that peace which passeth all understanding ; which calms the violence of every unruly passion, and supports the soul under every calamity ; which raises us above the sorrows and misfortunes of this life, by directing the attention of our minds to prospects of glory and immortality. The
disciple

disciple of Christ, therefore, instead of being eagerly engaged in the things of this world, or deeply interested in the various conflicts of human passions, prejudices and follies, boasts chiefly in the comforts of a meek and quiet spirit, and those calm, but superior satisfactions, which spring from the duties of piety, and a steady confidence in the mercy and goodness of God. Next to this blessed disposition, which may well be regarded as the good ground, in which the seed of every virtue will grow up to maturity and perfection, our heavenly Lord requires of us works of charity and neighbourly love, mutual forbearance, long-suffering, and steady perseverance in the course of every duty.

CONSIDER, therefore, whether he whose heart is actuated by the wild impulses of passion, and whose temper has never been submitted to the guidance of reason, or the discipline of religion, can ever fulfil the sacred obligations of a christian, or duly perform the duties which his Re-

deemer has enjoined? Can he lay claim to the merit of having loved his neighbour, with constancy and truth, who is ready, on every occasion, to treat him with capricious rage, or unmerited severity? Can he boast of having fulfilled the Apostle's precept, which directs us to live, as much as it is possible, peaceably with all men, who daily interrupts the comforts that should result from the most endearing relations of life, with the idle miseries of a fretful, peevish temper? Surely not. Nor can he plead, before the Eternal Judge, or even to his own conscience, that he has performed the pleasing duties of a fond parent, an affectionate husband, or a faithful friend, who, for want of cultivating peace within his own bosom, has often caused the tear of sorrow, instead of wiping it away, and multiplied the calamities of life to those who were most dear to him, and who would otherwise have "gone on their way rejoicing."

EVEN

EVEN the efficacy of piety and prayer will be destroyed by such evil dispositions. It is not a casual FIT of devotion that renders us accepted of the Father. We must cultivate HABITS of religion as well as of virtue. We must vanquish the lusts of the flesh, and earnestly strive after the fruits of the Spirit. No "prayers or alms" can go up for a memorial before God," from one who has never learned to "rule his spirit;" and out of whose heart proceedeth supplication for pardon one moment perhaps, and "confusion and every evil work" the next. Your innocence and peace, your virtue, your happiness here, and your acceptance with the Almighty Father hereafter depend therefore, in a great measure, on the cultivation of that gentle and complacent temper, which is the distinguishing ornament of a christian, and the chief source of happiness to ourselves and others.

MANY will delude themselves so far as to believe, that the temper is not an object

of cultivation ; that it is merely constitutional ; and that we are no more accountable for it, than for the particular formation and proportion of our bodies. But this is one of the vain subterfuges of self-love ; and every one that uses it knows it to be false, whenever he examines his own heart. Were not the temper, the passions and propensities of the mind proper objects of discipline and improvement, there would be an end of all merit and virtue ; nor could we be, in the eye of reason, or of nature, accountable creatures any longer.

BUT ask the most violent and irritable man, one who has taken no care to govern his mind from motives of DUTY, whether he has not often checked the emotions of anger and resentment, from a regard to time, place and circumstances ? Let him tell you, whether he has not had “ respect “ of PERSONS ;” and whether he has not often governed his tongue, from motives of interest and fear, or from the counteraction of some other passion. If such unworthy

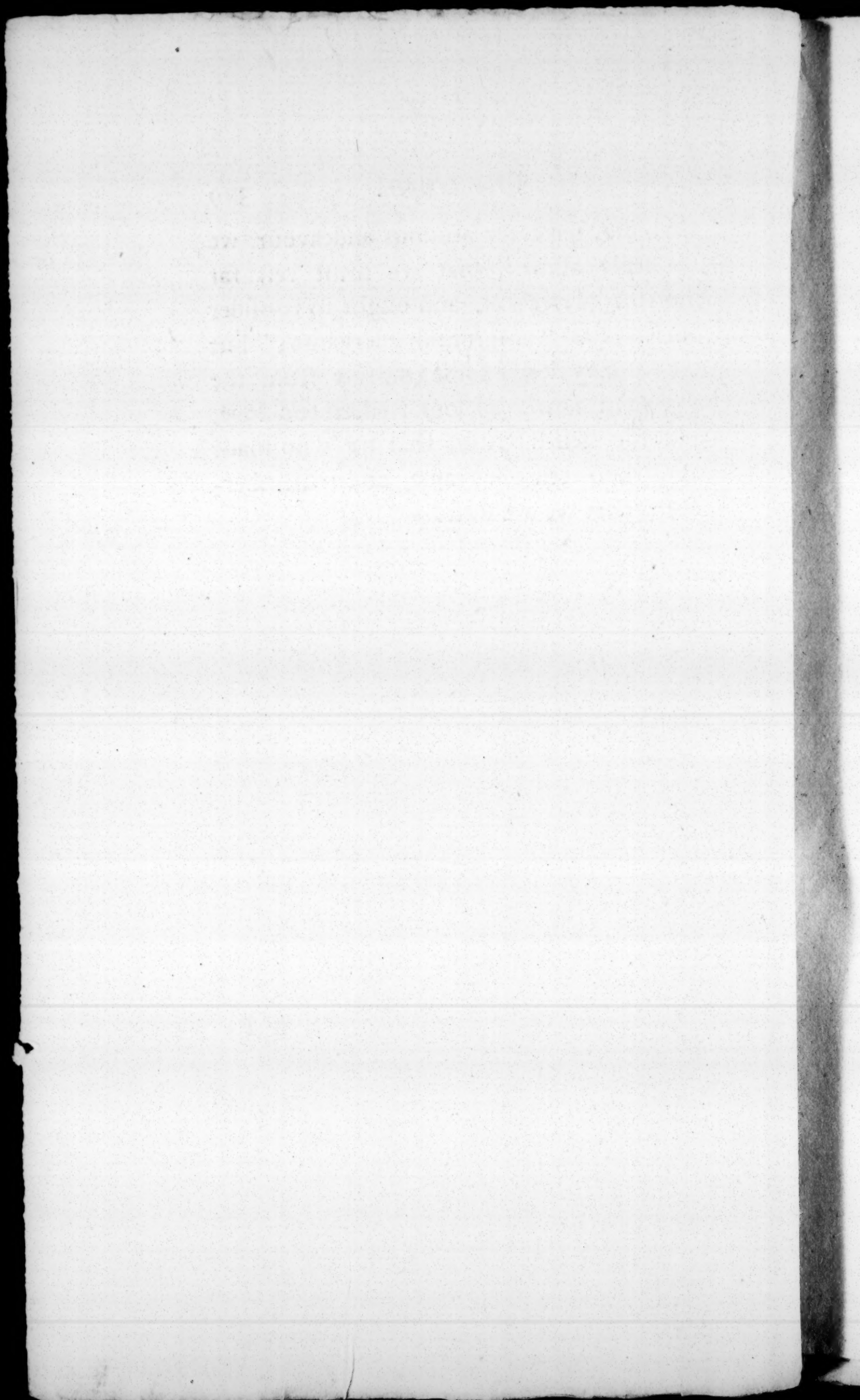
worthy motives have been known to regulate his conduct, and check the violent impulses of nature, surely that man becomes highly guilty, if he suffers not causes of a more exalted nature to produce the same effects; such are a regard to our own happiness, and the peace of those with whom we live, the love of man, and the favor of God.

NATURE, it is true, has cast us in different moulds. Some minds require a greater share of cultivation than others; but God knows the nature and value of the talent which he has entrusted to our care, and the opportunities we have had of improving it. He will prove a kind and merciful Judge, nor will he require of us more than we are able to perform. In fighting the good fight of faith, and pressing on towards the glorious prize of immortality, only let us exert all our powers: and that neither our understandings may be blinded by the misrepresentations of self-love, nor our consciences “hardened

“ through the deceitfulness of sin,” let us always remember that we live and act under the eye of omniscience. The frailties of human nature must sometimes prevail ; and there may be unguarded moments in which our hearts will be overpowered by the violent assaults of passion : but these are infirmities on which, it is hoped, our mighty Father will look with mercy, since only habit and indulgence can make them sinful. Yet we must remember, it is only on great and uncommon occasions, that we have reason to entertain this pleasing expectation. The holy Apostle, Peter, in a moment of generous indignation, at the cruel treatment of his blessed Lord, forgot the dignity of his profession, and smote the servant of the High-Priest with the sword. On such an occasion, and under such circumstances, the action was passed over with a gentle, but positive reproof ; and the precept, “ Be ye angry, and sin not,” makes due allowance for the weakness of human nature, and at the same time applies to the conscience as the law of God.

God. After every arduous endeavour, we are fully assured, that we must rest far short of perfection, and ought to consider ourselves as “unprofitable servants;” but yet we may derive some comfort from the abundant source of our Redeemer’s love, and the blessed truth, that HE who made us, “knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust.”

S E R.



S E R M O N XV.

THE CAUSES CONSIDERED THAT MADE
OUR LORD'S WORD WITH POWER.

L U K E iv. 32.

—*His word was with power.*

OUR Lord, having made his escape from the Jews of Nazareth, who sought to destroy him in the beginning of his divine ministry, went to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught the people “on the sabbath-days.” Such was the effect of his preaching here, that they were astonished at his doctrine; for, adds the holy evangelist, in the plain, unaffected style of the gospel, “his word was with power.” Previous to his coming into the

the world, indeed, the Jews had been taught by an illustrious series of prophecies to believe, that a divine energy would distinguish the words and actions of the Messiah. Yet they were weak enough to expect a mere temporal prince; one that was to eclipse the glory of David, and deliver them from the dominion of the Romans. But when “the
“ winds and seas obeyed him; when they
“ saw the dead raised to life, the blind re-
“ cover their sight, and the lame man leap
“ as an hart;” all might have known, that these were the works which best corresponded with the office of the Messiah, and the benevolent dispensations of providence in sending a Saviour upon earth.

HE whom the prophet styled “The ever-
“ lasting Father, the Prince of Peace,” was not to spread slaughter and devastation among mankind, like the ambitious princes of this world, under the vain pretence of glory and of conquest; but to establish a spiritual kingdom, a kingdom of peace, of righteousness and true holiness. It was

his superior glory “ to preach good tidings
“ to the meek, to bind up the broken-
“ hearted, and to proclaim the acceptable
“ year of the Lord.” Yes, it was the ob-
ject of his divine ministry “ to give unto
“ his people the knowledge of salvation ;
“ to afford light to them that sit in dark-
“ ness and in the shadow of death, and to
“ guide our feet into the way of peace.”

As the only begotten Son of the Father, he was invested, we are told, with all power both in heaven and in earth, and exalted far above the angels. Nothing less than the exertion of this divine power, in performing miracles and wonders, was necessary to subdue the prejudices, and enlighten the ignorance of a degenerate world. At this distance of time, we can only adore, without hoping to imitate, the mighty works which distinguished the ministry of our Lord, and which he performed, at once to manifest his love to man, and to afford the most unexceptionable grounds of faith in his kingdom. But though these miracu-
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lous proofs of his divinity have ceased, and that, we may suppose, because infinite wisdom saw there was no longer necessity for them ; yet there were other causes, very sufficient, of themselves, to make the people wonder at his doctrine, and to convince the whole world that “ his word was with “ power.” As these causes proceeded from perfections of character which we ourselves, as christians, are required to imitate, we cannot make them too often the subject of our meditations, especially in those hours which are set apart for the discharge of devotional duties.

I SHALL endeavour to shew, therefore, that the word of our blessed Lord was always attended with power ; I. From the truth and disinterestedness of his doctrines, and the superior excellence of his sentiments. II. From the gracious manner in which those sentiments were delivered. III. From the openness and sincerity of his reproof ; and IV. From his example.

BEFORE

BEFORE the christian æra, the whole world was given to the grossest idolatry. Even the Jews, who were taught the knowledge of the one true God, and at least the first rudiments of revelation, by Moses and the prophets, did not long remain uncontaminated by the example of their neighbours. Every one embraced the errors and superstitions of the country in which he lived, without giving himself the trouble to enquire whether his religion was worthy of a rational being or not, and without considering whether he “worshipped the Father in spirit and in truth.” Their devotion was seldom attended with any sentiment that connected the reverence of the Deity with the mild duties of humanity; and as they were but little interested in the practice of their respective systems, from motives of conscience, they were but little concerned either for their purity or success. The warrior, indeed, was ever ready to prostrate himself before the altars of his tutelary gods, when he hoped for victory, or when he wished to

animate the courage of his troops, by infusing into their minds the rage of religious enthusiasm ; and the dispensations of providence were vainly attempted to be discovered by unnecessary, and, oftentimes, cruel sacrifices.

WHILE the various nations of the earth were thus immersed in ignorance and barbarism, as far as related to divine worship ; and “ were,” as St. Paul observes, “ without God in the world ;” it was of the highest importance, and well worthy of the office of our blessed Redeemer, to publish to the world a more perfect knowledge of that Supreme Being, whose wisdom and whose power pervade all nature, and whom mankind had hitherto but “ ignorantly worshipped.” Before “ the day-spring from on high visited us,” there must have been always something wanting to interest the heart and satisfy the mind. Far from engaging with an earnest, but charitable zeal, in the propagation of their favorite polytheism, the Gentiles seem to have regarded

regarded religion only as an engine of policy, calculated to actuate or awe the common people; and from a total INDIFFERENCE, not a spirit of TOLERATION, affected to believe, or, at least, admitted, that the various and contending systems of surrounding nations were also of divine authority and sacred obligation.

To enlighten the human mind, therefore, on this grand subject, to create an interest in the HEART for the duties of piety, and, at the same time, to lay the foundation of a rational faith, were some of the many important objects of our Lord's mission.

THE will of the Deity with regard to his intelligent creatures, the soul's immortality and a future judgment, the dispensation of providence, as far as it related to the happiness or misery of spirits in a separate state, the means by which human infirmity was to be assisted, and the Almighty approached, with humble confidence, after repeated transgressions, were doctrines, some of which

the poets, indeed, had embellished with pleasing fictions, but which no being, merely human, could ever teach with sufficient authority. All rested on the uncertain ground of speculation only. One sect was every ready, from motives of philosophical vanity, to controvert the opinions of another; but the most virtuous, as well as the wisest of their sages, seems to have confessed, that divine assistance was necessary to teach men divine truth. From the revelation, therefore, of these and other doctrines, so agreeable to the general sense of mankind, so adapted to their wants, and at the same time so highly worthy of the Supreme Being, the word of our Lord, every other consideration apart, must necessarily "have been with power."

It derived a further degree of power from the sincere and disinterested manner in which the holy gospel was taught. Mankind now saw, for the first time, a system of divine worship inculcated that was wholly unconnected with the policy of
of

of the world, and in no wise calculated to promote the grandeur, or foster the ambition of princes. The precepts also which our blessed Redeemer delivered for the instruction of his disciples were, of themselves, sufficient to claim the wonder and admiration of all mankind. Before he condescended "to take up his abode and dwell "among us," the world was ignorant of the most amiable virtues that adorn the human character. The principle of universal charity and benevolence, which the gospel so strongly inculcates, was, perhaps, as a duty, utterly unknown, or, at least, left unpractised. Instead of meekness and forbearance, long-suffering and humility, we might discover in the theory and practice of heathen nations, a fierce and intolerant spirit of pride, that blended itself with every principle, and ruled, more or less, in almost every action.

It is true, we may collect a few scattered rays of that glorious light, which shines with so much lustre throughout the

gospel, from the writings of some of the ancients. Here and there, we might discover a something like the gentleness of christian morality; but these were a few speculative ideas originally borrowed from revelation, perhaps, and which served only to amuse the imagination of the philosopher, without having any influence in the general concerns of life.

FARTHER, the system of holiness, which our Lord and Saviour taught, did not consist of maxims that were formed in solitude by study and contemplation. The blessed truths which He delivered, were the unpremeditated effusions of that divine wisdom, which was, at all times, sufficient to correct the ignorance, and assist the frailty of human beings. At the request of his disciples, he taught them, instantly, to address their heavenly Father in a form of prayer, so beautiful in its composition, so truly sublime in its expressions, and so comprehensive in all its petitions, that the human mind cannot conceive any thing more perfect,

perfect, or so well adapted to the wants of man, as he stands in relation to his Maker. He, therefore, was the living teacher of the world. He did not confine his doctrines to any particular sect, or school, into which his disciples were to be formally initiated, nor even to a chosen people; but went about, from place to place, sometimes teaching, to "all that had ears to hear," truths that had never yet been fully revealed, and sometimes explaining those duties, in their full force, which had been "rendered of no effect," by the traditions of the Pharisees, or by the corruptions of the priests and rulers.

FROM the openness of his manner, and the freedom with which he addressed the multitudes that thronged to hear him, the Jews hoped to entangle him in some contradictions, or bewilder him with their subtilties; but such was his superior wisdom, that they were always repulsed with mortification and disgrace. Instances of this frequently occur in the holy gospel.

The case of the woman who had seven husbands, proposed to him by the Sadducees, the insidious enquiry about the tribute-money, and the replies which he made the Pharisees, when they accused him of violating the sabbath, and reproached him for associating with publicans and sinners, are well known. On these, and similar occasions, he amply fulfilled the precept, which he afterwards gave his disciples, and, to "the wisdom of the serpent," united "the innocence of the dove." But the case of the lawyer, who "stood up" and tempted him," to use the expression of the evangelist, deserves particular consideration.

THIS man, we might suppose, from his profession and his conduct, was well-versed in the Mosaic law, and the books of the Talmud also. When, therefore, he asked "what he should do to inherit eternal life," our Lord, with great propriety, enquired of him, "what was written in the law—how readest thou?" continued he.

he. The lawyer, that he might by no means appear deficient in his profession, recited, with great accuracy, his duty towards God, and his duty towards his neighbour. He was told, by our Lord, with that plainness and simplicity which distinguished all his words, that he had answered right; "this do," continued he, "and thou shalt live." Here, one might suppose, the conversation would have ended; but he, with all the subtilty and chicanery of a scribe, proceeded, by asking, "who is my neighbour?" This seems to have been a poor attempt to embarrass the Saviour of the world, and "a teacher that was come from God," by requiring of him a nice and logical distinction between a REAL and SUPPOSED neighbour. A question of this nature might, indeed, have perplexed a mere worldly master, or given rise to some obvious and common reply. But so far was it from disconcerting our blessed Lord, that he uttered, on the occasion, a parable so beautiful and perfect in all its parts, and so wonderfully adapted to satisfy

the curiosity, and silence the presumption of the arrogant scribe, that we can never sufficiently admire its excellence, or reverence its precepts. But, as I have already made this the subject of a preceding discourse, it will not be necessary to enlarge any farther on it here. Let me only observe, that were we to examine every parable in the New Testament, we should find that they were all delivered in the same unpremeditated manner, and for the purpose of enforcing some important truth or doctrine.

It is observable, also, that our Lord and Redeemer omitted no opportunity of enlivening his instructions, and rendering his preaching more effectual, by selecting the most striking and familiar images from nature, that were presented to his notice. When he was led, in his heavenly sermon on the Mount, to warn his followers against any distrust of the divine providence, and wished them to suppress all anxiety for the mere "pomps and vanities of life,"
he

he directed their attention to "the fowls
"of the air," that were finging around
them, perhaps, and "the lilies of the field"
that were then in full bloom. When the
harvest approached, he admonished his dis-
ciples of the spiritual harvest. When in
the fertile and favourite mount of Olives,
which abounded with vines, he spoke in
metaphor, with peculiar force and beauty,
of the husbandmen, the vine and branches.
On the solemn feast of tabernacles, when
the Jews, according to custom, brought a
great quantity of water into the temple
from the river Shiloah, our Lord stood and
cried, "if any man thirst, let him come
"unto me, and drink." The day after, al-
luding to the manumission of the servants
on account of the sabbatical year, he said,
"if ye continue in my word, the TRUTH
"shall make you FREE." So replete, in-
deed, was his conversation with lively
imagery and striking allusions, that the
evangelist, with some reason, says, "with-
"out a parable spake he not unto them."
Thus, was "his word with power," and
thus

thus it might well be observed, that " he
" taught men as one having authority, and
" not as the scribes."

IN proceeding with the subject under our present contemplation, it might be necessary to remark, that mankind had long been separated by vile distinctions. The two rival and predominant sects in Judea were the Pharisees and Sadducees. The former paid little attention to inward purity and practical holiness, but were satisfied with a pompous and ostentatious performance of the mere ceremonies of religion, and a blind, but ardent zeal for the idle traditions of the elders. The latter, who believed not in a future state of existence, but thought that the rewards and punishments of divine justice were confined to this world, might have been truly said, in the beautiful language of scripture, to sit, as yet, " in darkness, and in the region
" and shadow of death." Each regarded his neighbour with a degree of hostile and intolerant pride, while religion, instead of
uniting

uniting mankind in the bands of social union, served only to keep them at variance, by sowing the seeds of animosity and malevolence. To the common people, and to those whose minds were not heated by the zeal of angry priests and contending sectaries, the blessings of divine revelation could not be extended. The poor, who were forced to "earn their bread by the sweat of their brow," had neither time nor ability to join the Pharisees in their idle ostentation and expensive offerings; and as for the Sadducees, they neither professed any sentiments of piety that could firmly attach the heart to the worship of God, or the love of man; nor held any articles of belief, on which the soul could rely with steadfast confidence. But men were now told, by the same authority which "brought life and immortality to light," that God is no respecter of persons; but that "in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." A religion was now published, in the fulness of time, whose obligations extended to the whole world.

world. The rich and poor were equally capable of fulfilling its laws, and growing wise unto salvation ; or, if there were any advantage, it was in favor of the latter. Those whom the world was most ready to persecute and distress, or treat with insolence and overbearing pride, were now pronounced to be blessed. Such were “ the
“ meek, the poor in spirit, and they that
“ mourn.” Well, therefore, might “ all
“ men seek for the author of these blef-
“ sed truths,” and, more especially, might
“ the common people wonder at the gra-
“ cious words which proceeded out of his
“ mouth.”

BUT farther, the word of our Lord was attended with power, from the gracious manner in which all his doctrines were delivered. The most distinguishing characteristics of his preaching were a meekness and gentleness, blended with a sincerity of affection, that was truly divine. As an instance of this, we need only remember his short address to the multitudes that
came

came to see and hear him. "Come unto
" me all ye that labor, and are heavy
" laden, and I will give you rest. Take
" my yoke upon you, and learn of me;
" for I am meek and lowly of heart, and
" ye shall find rest unto your souls."
When such a gracious invitation to duty
was held out to all mankind, who could
forbear contrasting it with the spiritual
pride of the Pharisees, and who could re-
frain from "hearing it with joy?"

IN his divine ministry, there was none of
the moroseness of philosophy, nor any of
that mysterious pomp of science which
shrank from the observation of the world.
Men were taught the sublimest truths and
most important doctrines, by one who
mingled with all ranks of people, on terms
of perfect familiarity; who resolved their
doubts, corrected their errors, and helped
their infirmities. But in this wonderful
condescension and great humility, the hea-
venly Messiah lost none of the dignity or
splendor of his character. In his humility
there

there was nothing to be seen of the mean compliances of a base or worldly mind ; and in his charity and forbearance, there was none of that affected candor and canting liberality, which are too often the flimsy disguises of hypocrisy, or the specious pretexts of shameful indifference. He had no respect of persons ; but, as occasion required, freely rebuked, or kindly admonished, men in the most exalted stations, as well as those of lower degree. He was seldom provoked to severity, except, indeed, when the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, or the corruption of the Scribes came under his notice ; and then it may be confidently said, that he never wounded, but with a view to heal. Such was the wonderful effect of his ministry, that individuals of the most discordant principles and jarring interests united in their reverence and admiration of this “ Prince of Peace.” Among these were publicans and Pharisees, Centurions and Samaritans. Such was the veneration, or eager curiosity of Zaccheus, we find, that “ he ran before and climbed
“ up

“ up into a sycamore-tree, to see our Lord
“ pass by.”

INDEPENDENT of the causes which have been already enumerated to shew that “ his
“ word was with power,” we know not what personal and more endearing graces distinguished his manner and conversation. We can only imagine that rays of divine glory beamed from his eyes, that there was something more than mortal in the accents of his voice, and that, in all his actions, there was a dignity that surpasses the conception of the human mind. There are a few circumstances in the gospel-history, which render this probable, at least, if not certain. When Peter had denied his Saviour, and the cock crew, as had been foretold, St. Luke says, that our Lord “ turned and looked upon him.” There was a something in this look, better to be imagined than described, which, added to the consciousness of his infidelity and falsehood, pierced the aged and penitent apostle to the heart. He could no longer
endure

endure the presence of his divine Master, but "went out and wept bitterly." When the soldiers, also, were sent to apprehend him, though they were seldom withheld from executing any commission, however bloody, from sentiments of humanity; yet they returned, awed with reverence by his manner and conversation, alledging for their excuse, that "never man spake like "this man." When he joined the two disciples, as they journeyed to Emmaus, and entered into conversation with them, "they said one to another," after he had left them, "did not our heart burn within "us, while he talked with us by the way, "and while he opened to us the scriptures?" He himself also observed to his disciples, "blessed are the eyes which see "the things that ye see!" Blessed, indeed! What devout christian is there who does not indulge the fond, but ineffectual wish, that he could have seen him perform some of his miracles of love, heard him pronounce his divine sermon on the Mount,
or

or sat down with him and his beloved disciples, eaten of the bread which he brake, and drunk of the cup which he blessed !

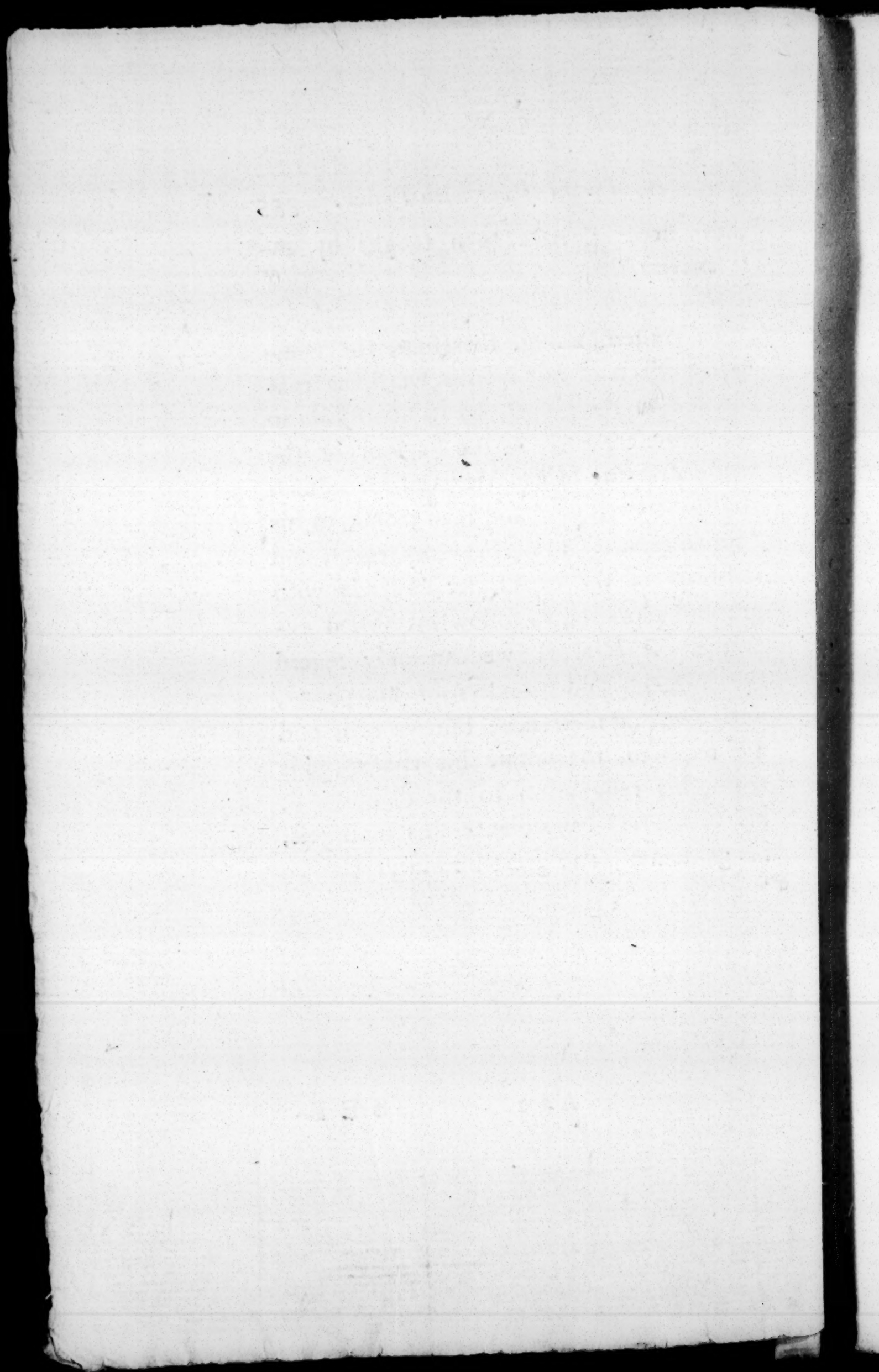
WE come now to shew that our Lord's word was rendered powerful also, from the openness and sincerity of his reproof. He was not an occasional teacher, that exercised his function at stated periods ; but his whole life and conversation was a lesson of instruction. When he retired to rest, when he walked through the fields, or when he sat down at meat with Pharisees, publicans and sinners, he always assumed the office, and used the authority of the Messiah. No regard to time or place could render him indifferent to errors of conduct, or violation of duty. When invited to the entertainments of the chief Pharisees, which often happened, he always endeavoured to correct their haughtiness and pride, their want of charity to others, and their blind attachment to their own customs, and withdrew their attention from outward cleanliness and exterior

observances, to inward purity and sanctity of heart.

BUT, lastly, the word of our Lord was with power from his example. It is this which must give vigor and effect to all precept. Little does it avail for a teacher to instruct others in what he cannot, or will not practise himself. Had the Saviour of the world stood up to comfort the wretched, and heal the broken-hearted, when he himself was perfectly at ease, he would not have succeeded much better than many other worldly teachers. But when joy, consolation, and blessedness were pronounced on the persecuted and the poor, by one, who "had not himself where to lay his head," who could hear him with indifference, or what heart could refuse the balm of comfort? Throughout his whole ministry, his example sanctified his precepts; and when men were instructed by one who fulfilled every duty which he inculcated, and experienced every affliction which he endeavoured to assuage, they must

must needs "have been taught by authority."

IN contemplating, therefore, the wonderful effects of our Lord's word, as manifested in the gospel, let us adore him in his divine capacity, as the Saviour of the world and the blessed Mediator for human frailty between God and man ; and, in his human capacity, as the heavenly teacher and reformer of the world, let us study with grateful adoration to follow his blessed example. It is true, we can only regard the miracles and wonders of his power, with love and reverence ; but we can, and are required, to imitate his charity, his truth, his resignation to the divine will, his unwearied benevolence, his meekness, his gentleness, and great humility.



S E R M O N XVI.

ON THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST.

ISAIAH liii. 3.

He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

ONE of the strongest arguments in favor of christianity is the wonderful accomplishment of the prophecies in the person of our blessed Saviour. The place of his birth, the manner of his life and death, his miracles, and the virtues for which he was to be famous, are foretold in the most circumstantial manner. So particularly are his sufferings and calamities described in the admirable chap-

ter from which I have taken my text, that one of the most profligate and abandoned infidels that ever disgraced religion or morality, was converted by reading it, and (as a learned and pious divine informs us) continued ever after a penitent and sincere christian. But a quotation or two from the scripture itself will give more authority to this argument than any thing else. "Search the scriptures," says our blessed Lord, "for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me." You may remember, also, when St. Paul was arraigned before the King of the Jews, for preaching the doctrines of the gospel, after having related his miraculous conversion, he appealed to the authority of the prophets to establish the truth of that system which he had so zealously espoused. "King Agrippa," said the venerable apostle, "believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest." What was the effect produced on his mind by this question? Why, so forcibly did the agreement of prophecy

prophecy with the circumstances of our blessed Lord's life and death strike him, that he answered in confusion, " Almost " thou persuadest me to be a christian."

I SHALL on the present occasion, therefore, first shew you a full completion of the words in the text, I trust, and other prophecies that relate to the sufferings of the Messiah, by giving you a short view of his calamitous history; and shall endeavour to strengthen the general argument by adverting to the prophets occasionally as we proceed. I shall then attempt to explain some of the many advantages which the doctrines of the holy gospel derive from the sufferings of its divine Author and his primitive apostles.

IF we wish to trace his sorrows to their source, we must go back as far as the hour of his birth. Indeed, there was nothing but prospects of misery for him even before he was born. Augustus Cæsar, it seems, in those days, issued out a decree

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that

that all the world should be taxed; that is, all his subjects were to register their names in a public manner, to gratify his vanity and ambition who wished to know their exact number. For this purpose, all were ordered to go, every one to his own city. It was then, too, that Joseph, with Mary his espoused wife, went up to their own city, as far as from Nazareth to Bethlehem. During the sickly and painful time of child-bearing, she was forced to undertake this long, laborious journey; and though we are not informed of the particular circumstances which attended it, yet we may very reasonably suppose, that, on account of her poverty, and more, from the peculiar distress of her situation, she was but ill provided for such an expedition. We know not what misfortunes she had to struggle with. Poor and friendless, perhaps, she could not purchase necessary comfort and refreshment. We are the more readily led to suppose this was the case, when we call to mind the hardship and calamity that attended her, after she
and

and her husband had reached the end of their journey. "When the days were accomplished that she should be delivered," when "the great pain and peril of child-birth came upon her," at such a time and in such a place, though her distresses might have claimed protection, and the anguish of her mind commanded pity, yet, we find, "there was no room for THEM in the inn;" so, without the comforts which the most abject wretch commonly enjoys, "she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger." Thus did he enter the world in the most miserable state of poverty, and was "acquainted with grief," even from his birth.

No sooner was he born than new scenes of misery, new prospects of calamity, opened before him. Herod, having heard that a King of the Jews was born, with unrelenting cruelty slew all the young children that were in, or near Bethlehem, under

der two years old. But before this barbarous event, Joseph was warned to flee with the young child and his mother into Egypt. Here was another laborious and distressful pilgrimage for them; they were to flee into a land of strangers; innocent as they were, and free from all offence, they were forced to leave their kindred and their native city, and the blessed Jesus began to suffer that persecution in his infancy, which attended his whole ministry on earth, and which, at last, terminated in the agonies of the cross. But on the death of Herod, they were re-called to Galilee, and then was fulfilled, as St. Matthew observes, that which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt have I called my Son."

It would be too extensive for my present purpose to take notice of every circumstance that relates to the calamities of our Lord, as they are connected with the prophecies in the Old Testament; I shall therefore pass over the earlier part of his
life,

life, and proceed to consider him in his public capacity; when he began to preach his holy gospel, and when the time was accomplished that he should make himself manifest to the children of Israel.

HE was at this time, as we learn from St. Luke, about thirty years of age; and he had not long taken upon him his divine office, before his miracles alone made it sufficiently evident that he was the Son of God. He gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and those who were dumb received the power of speech. Besides this, he cured all manner of diseases; the leprosy, the fever, the palsy, and the dropsey; and that, not by any human means, but by the bare touch of his hand alone, and sometimes by a word of command. The lame too, and the maimed, the withered and the halt, were again restored and made perfectly whole. Here, we cannot but take notice of the exact and almost literal accomplishment of that wonderful prophecy of Isaiah, who had foretold that
such

such miracles should be performed by the Messiah, in these very remarkable words. "Behold your God will come and save you; then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing." These things, too, as the holy apostle says, "were not done in a corner," but in different parts of the Jewish nation, and frequently in the presence of whole multitudes who could testify their truth. To crown these miracles of love, he raised three persons from the dead; the ruler's daughter in the chamber, the widow's son in the street, and his friend Lazarus; who, when he called him from the grave, after he had been buried four days, "came forth," as St. John tells us, "bound hand and foot with grave-clothes."

BUT, notwithstanding all this, and though, as the prophet had foretold, "he preached good tidings to the meek,
" bound

“ bound up the broken-hearted, and proclaimed liberty to the captive;” yet we learn that his enemies grew more inveterate against him, and the unbounded love and kindness which he shewed to the whole world, only brought fresh sorrows and calamities upon his own head! All his benevolence was misconstrued by the envy, malice and jealousy of the priests and rulers of the people; and every artful, every mean and despicable subterfuge was used to poison the minds of the ignorant, and to irritate the mob against him. If he freed poor wretches from the dominion of evil spirits, he was accused of being in league with the powers of darkness; if he healed their diseases and pardoned their sins, then he was charged with blasphemy; not all the wonderful works that distinguished his ministry, not the divinity of his preaching, the disinterestedness of his conduct, nor the sanctity of his morals, could secure him from the rage of party, and the persecutions of the obdurate Jews. To add to his afflictions, we read too, that
while

while he was thus assiduously employed in the discharge of his divine office, he was so extremely poor, that "certain good women ministered to his necessities out of their substance," and he himself has told us, that he had "not where to lay his head;" contrasting, at the same time, his wretched condition "with the foxes that have holes," as he observed, and "the birds of the air that have nests." Thus was "he despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

As we pursue his melancholy history, we find his calamities still increasing, till they ended with his last sufferings on the cross. They were aggravated too with uncommon circumstances. He was betrayed into the hands of his enemies by one of those men whom he had chosen for his disciples. In the trying hour of his affliction, also, when his enemies "came out against him as against a thief or murderer, armed with swords and staves,"
all

all forsook him and fled ; all except Peter, who “ followed afar off,” says the holy evangelist, but who followed only to deny him. Thus deserted by his friends, he is delivered up into the hands of his blood-thirsty enemies, and dragged away to judgment, helpless, and forsaken ! Here, as the prophet had foretold, “ he was oppressed and afflicted, “ yet he opened not his mouth.” Such was the rage and so violent were the outcries which his enemies had kindled against him, that no plea of innocence, no moderation could be listened to from the timid and irresolute judge, but he was prevailed upon, against his own conscience, to give him up to their merciless fury, though “ he found no fault in “ him,” and, instead of the blessed Jesus, released a public felon. We all know what insults and indignities he suffered from the basest of mankind. It is not common, in the most barbarous nations, to aggravate the torments of a poor wretch while he is in the hands of the executioner. The

most vindictive spirit, one would suppose, might be satisfied with the loss of life, with life lingered out in agonies upon the cross; but this was not the case with him. He was forced to endure preparatory torments; "though he had done no violence," and though it had been the chief business of his life to teach men mercy, love and kindness! Besides the scourging with rods, which, it seems, a cruel law permitted, he was buffeted and spit on; crowned with thorns in derision, and exposed to all the mockery and rudeness of a pitiless and senseless rabble. His precious blood was not sufficient to glut their malice and revenge, but his miseries must still be insulted and increased, by the wantonness of every thoughtless and unfeeling ruffian, whose cruel malignity no sense of virtue could suppress, and no sense of shame restrain. If we proceed a little further, we shall find him crucified between two common malefactors; and, to give the last perfection to his divine character, leaving the world with a prayer for his murderers. "Father," said he,

8

"forgive

“ forgive them, for they know not what
“ they do.”

HAVING fully shewn, I trust, that “ he
“ was despised and rejected of men, a man
“ of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,”
we come now to consider the advantages
which the doctrines of his holy gospel, and
we its professors, derive from the sufferings
of its ever-sacred author, and his primitive
apostles.

THE miseries they endured, and the
cruelties to which they patiently submitted,
in order to establish their system of holiness,
afford us the strongest possible argument of
their sincerity ; and both their precepts and
example derive a lustre from this which
they could not have done from any thing
else. Every good man, while he reveres
the innocence and integrity of their lives,
will receive, with humble faith, the doc-
trines which they revealed, and the pre-
cepts which they delivered. The enemies
of christianity may vainly cavil ; for what

most vindictive spirit, one would suppose, might be satisfied with the loss of life, with life lingered out in agonies upon the cross ; but this was not the case with him. He was forced to endure preparatory torments ; “ though he had done no violence,” and though it had been the chief business of his life to teach men mercy, love and kindness ! Besides the scourging with rods, which, it seems, a cruel law permitted, he was buffeted and spit on ; crowned with thorns in derision, and exposed to all the mockery and rudeness of a pitiless and senseless rabble. His precious blood was not sufficient to glut their malice and revenge, but his miseries must still be insulted and increased, by the wantonness of every thoughtless and unfeeling ruffian, whose cruel malignity no sense of virtue could suppress, and no sense of shame restrain. If we proceed a little further, we shall find him crucified between two common malefactors ; and, to give the last perfection to his divine character, leaving the world with a prayer for his murderers. “ Father,” said he,

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afford us the strongest possible argument of
their sincerity ; and both their precepts and
example derive a lustre from this which
they could not have done from any thing
else. Every good man, while he reveres
the innocence and integrity of their lives,
will receive, with humble faith, the doc-
trines which they revealed, and the pre-
cepts which they delivered. The enemies
of christianity may vainly cavil ; for what

human knowledge is there that might not be perplexed with doubts? But I would ask them, where shall we repose confidence if we cannot in the best of men? Men whose lives were devoted to the practice of meek and humble piety, and the unwearied exercise of every social duty? Men who with the most illustrious fortitude encountered dangers and distresses in every shape, and, at last, met the most cruel deaths unappalled, that they might vindicate their doctrines and establish the truth of the gospel on the firmest foundation. If such men are not to be believed, whom are we to trust, or where shall we seek for truth? Had they lived in affluence, indeed, while they despised riches; or, had they shrunk from danger, when they were opposed, persecuted and destroyed by the powerful and the great; then, indeed, their holy system could not have received that sanction which their sufferings have given it: but now, we may learn every virtue from it with the greatest advantage, and in the utmost perfection.

IF we wish, for instance, to acquire fortitude, the most necessary, perhaps, of all human virtues, where shall we find greater, and at the same time, more amiable examples of it, than among those men, who with a resolution, which no dangers or distresses could conquer, opposed the ignorance and superstition of a guilty world, taught men their duty, and PRACTISED what they taught. Hear with what manly boldness Peter and John addressed the Jewish rulers, immediately after they had been freed from prison, and commanded by them, “not to speak
“at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus.” When menaced by those jealous persecutors of truth, they were not to be frightened from their purpose by threats, nor awed into silence by power; but answered, in the language of conscious innocence and heroic virtue, “whether it be right in the
“sight of God to hearken unto you, more
“than unto God, judge ye.”

AGAIN, where shall we find patience and humility taught in so heavenly a man-

ner? Though harrassed by every misfortune, perplexed with every difficulty, and threatened with every danger, they discovered the most placid contentment and chearful submission to the will of God. "Being reviled they reviled not again, but
" blessed those who cursed them, and pray-
" ed for them who despitefully used them." Strangers to the rancorous passions of malice, hatred and revenge, they went about doing good to all; and perfectly satisfied with the dispensations of providence THEMSELVES, the business of their lives was to make OTHERS so. They blessed God, therefore, eating their frugal meal with thankfulness, and often retired to the shades of solitude, or their favorite mount, and sung hymns of praise to their great Creator.

THE poor and unfortunate should remember, that the Apostles of Christ were no idle speculatists, who taught virtues which they did not practise, but men who confirmed their precepts by example. They did not, like some, preach against the ills
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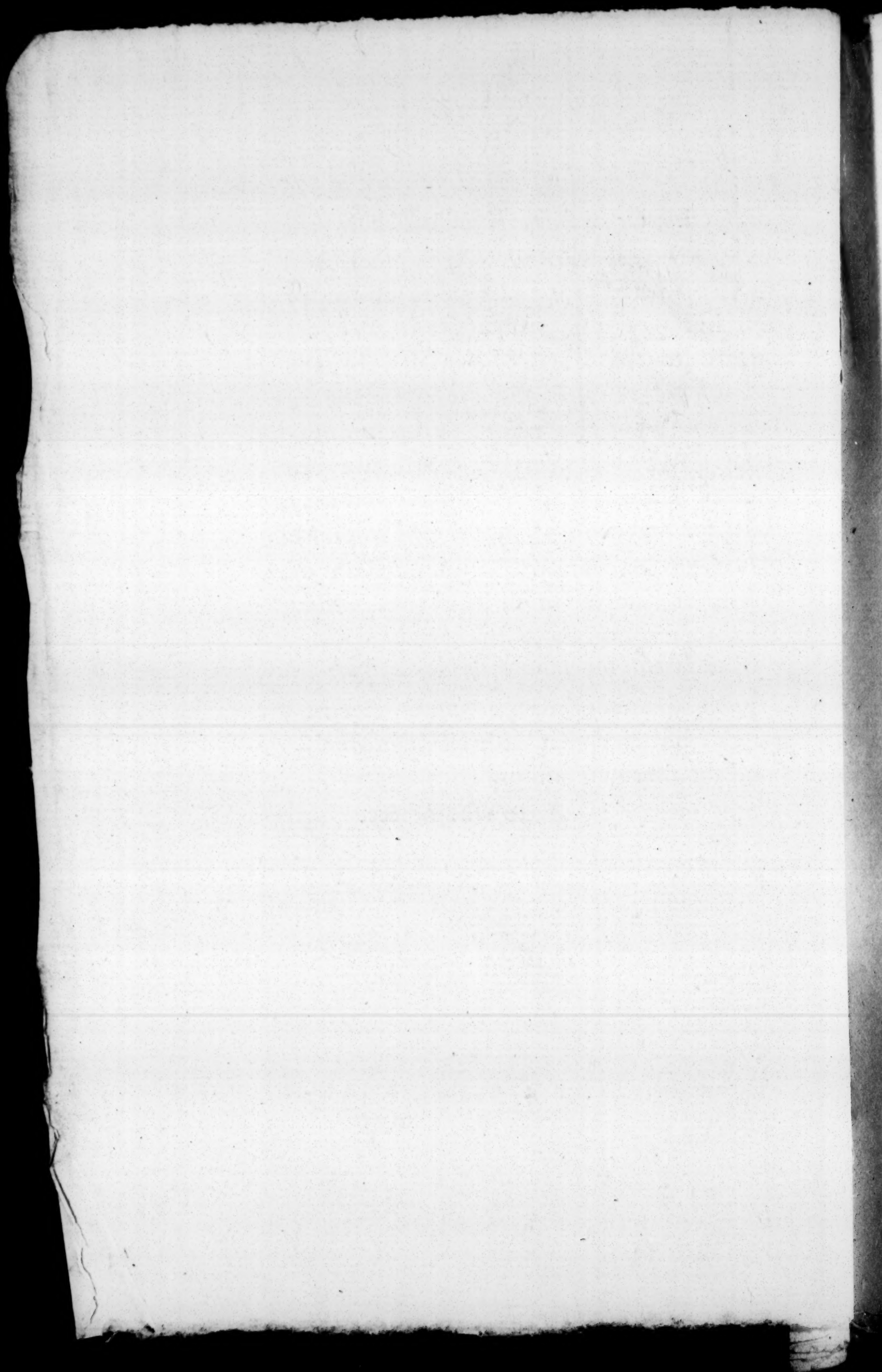
of life and endeavour to reason away the force of sorrow, while they themselves were furrounded with affluence and honors; but, in the very depth of poverty, and under the greatest misfortunes, taught men the dangers that waited on riches, and, “having food and raiment,” inculcated contentment. It is an easy task, we know, for men favoured by fortune, and unacquainted with distress, to lay down rules of conduct for others, and point out the road which leads from misery to happiness; but these meek and humble teachers disclosed the living sources of comfort to their followers, while oppressed with the heaviest calamities; and though THEY, of all men in the world, least experienced what we call the BLESSINGS of providence, yet they best vindicated its GOODNESS, its JUSTICE and its MERCY.

LASTLY, if we wish to learn the love that is due to our neighbour, where shall we find it taught in so divine a manner, as in his example whose life was one continued

scene of universal charity to all mankind, “ though he was despised and rejected of “ them,” and whose death purchased the pardon and redemption of the world? Or in the practice of that little flock which survived their heavenly master? To support the sacred cause, and guard their brethren from danger and distress, as well as they could, they associated together with one common interest, and deposited every one his little stock in their common treasury. Thus did they profit by their blessed Master’s instructions, and were in the beginning of their ministry, “ as wise as serpents, and as harmless as doves.”

IF such proofs of sincerity, such examples of piety and virtue, will not excite men to the practice of good works, and create in them “ a steadfast and lively faith,” may we not affirm, that “ neither will they be “ persuaded, though one rose from the “ dead!” For, surely, every thing has been done that could be done, to inculcate the love of our neighbour and the worship
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of God. Our reason is addressed in the most powerful and engaging manner, and the most perfect examples are exhibited for our imitation and instruction. We are allured to the practice of virtue by the promise of reward, and we are deterred from vice by the threats of future punishment. We are awed by fear, we are cheered and encouraged by hope, and may learn for our comfort, under the pressure of every calamity, that “the kingdom of heaven is open to all believers.” May we not exclaim then, with the holy apostle, “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” That we may not neglect it, but receive it with all due submission, thankfulness and praise, God, of his infinite mercy, grant, to whom, &c.



S E R M O N XVII.

ON THE BIRTH OF CHRIST,

LUKE ii. 14.

*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth
peace ; good-will towards men *.*

THE text is the glorious proclamation of the heavenly host on the birth of our blessed Lord and Saviour. That grand and illustrious event was distinguished by such strikingly solemn and awful circumstances as were suitable to it. The wise men of the East, or the Magi, journeyed from their native country to Jerusalem, warned by the appearance of a

* Preached on Christmas-day,

a star

star in the skies, that the Saviour of the world was about to take up his abode with man. It was the miraculous light of heaven that directed their search, and passed over their heads, “ till it came and stood
“ over where the young child was,” says St. Matthew. The circumstances which St. Luke adds are inexpressibly beautiful and sublime. “ And there were in the
“ same country shepherds abiding in the
“ field, keeping watch over their flock
“ by night. And lo, the angel of the
“ Lord came upon them, and the glory
“ of the Lord shone round about them,
“ and they were sore afraid. And the
“ angel said unto them, fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great
“ joy, which shall be to all people; for
“ unto you is born this day, in the city
“ of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the
“ Lord. And suddenly there was with the
“ angel a multitude of the heavenly host
“ praising God, and saying, Glory to God
“ in the highest, and on earth peace;
“ good-will towards men.”

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IT is in commemoration of this great and glorious event that we are assembled together ; and our time may be employed in a manner suitable to the solemn occasion, if we consider some of the many particulars, in which it may be truly said, that the birth of our Lord was attended with the most distinguishing good-will to men.

FIRST, it is to him that we owe the knowledge of the only true and living God. Some intercessor, some Being, endowed with more than human intelligence, was necessary to bring us acquainted with the Almighty Father, and to reconcile us to the dispensations of his providence. Whatever notions the human mind might acquire of the divine nature, by the exercise of reason, they must rest, after every anxious enquiry has been made, on the uncertain ground of speculation only. The attributes and existence of a being that is omnipotent and omniscient, are so very remote, so totally different from those subjects

jects which fall within the limits of the understanding, and those objects which engross the attention of our lives, that few truths were to be collected from them, by the major part of mankind, of sufficient certainty to form any steady principles of action, or sufficient efficacy to subdue temptation and improve the heart. Accordingly, religion in the earlier ages of the world, instead of being a system of holiness and practical duty, was nothing but a collection of gross and absurd tenets, generally calculated to promote cruelty, instead of love, or mercy among men. It was always subservient to ambition, and sometimes to tyranny. It was filled with foolish and fantastic terrors, and encumbered with unavailing ceremonies and oblations, partly to awe the ignorant multitude, or to keep them employed; and partly to foster the more crafty and designing in pride, in luxury and idleness.

SUCH were the striking and general features of religion before the light of revelation

lation dawned upon mankind. To remove these abuses, and to clear away these clouds of error, was an office well suited to the character of the Son of God. The invariable experience of many revolving ages had taught men the want and necessity of relying on something that carried more authority with it, more weight and information than the mere speculations of men. The mediation of the blessed Jesus was necessary to disclose the dispensations of heaven to us, as far as they relate to the occasions of life, and to settle a system of piety sufficiently powerful to influence and engage "the counsels of the heart." He has accordingly, in his ever-sacred gospel, united the duty which we owe our Maker so intimately with the love that is due to man, and heightened both by the intermixture of such affections as have most influence over the heart, that nothing can be conceived more perfect, or so well adapted to improve the condition of human nature, and to promote the glory of God,

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THE doctrine of a future state of existence, also, that was to last for ever, and to be marked with happiness or woe; a doctrine so awful in itself, and that had so long engaged the anxious hopes and fears of every thinking being, he has clearly stated and established on the firmest foundation. Before his coming, it was enveloped in darkness, doubt and perplexity. With great propriety therefore is it asserted, that "life and immortality were brought
" to light through the gospel."

THESE are some of the particulars of that divine knowledge which our Lord propagated, and by which he discovered his "good-will towards men." If we take a short view of christian morality, and the many blessed effects which it has, or ought to have, on human conduct, we shall have further cause to acknowledge his transcendant love and goodness.

By taking on him the form of man, he certainly became the better qualified to be
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the instructor of men. By this wonderful condescension, in suffering himself to be exposed to the same temptations, the same hardships and calamities that are incident to the most abject of the human race, he has familiarized his divine nature to our understanding, and kindled such sympathy and exalted affection in our bosom, as not only invigorates our piety, but inspires a mixture of gratitude and love, of worship and adoration for our heavenly Master not to be described.

THE virtues which he has labored to establish, and by which he has eminently shewn his good-will to men, are such as would effectually promote their interests here and hereafter ; such as are admirably calculated to cherish the gentle and humane affections, to check every unruly passion that tends to enmity or the disorder of life, and to endear us to each other by the duties of justice, and the kind offices of charity. Before the times of christianity, that forbearance and “ quietness of spirit,” on which so many

many perfections of character are founded, were almost, if not entirely, unknown in the world. A fierce, vindictive spirit that immediately prompted the execution of vengeance for every trifling injury or insult, was deemed meritorious ; and he that could go, on every occasion, and embrue his hands in the blood of his fellow-creatures, was distinguished for his prowess, and honored as a HERO. That patient fortitude which inspires calmness and resolution amid the tempestuous scenes of life ; that serenity which attends the good man in affliction, and which, indeed, is derived from a higher source than the exertion of the mind in a state of nature, were virtues to which men had been utter strangers.

NOR were the mild duties of meekness and humility better known or practised in the world. A ferocious pride, and the maintenance of a fierce and savage dignity, were passions that almost wholly shared the human heart. The softening of the mind of man, by suppressing every desire that
tends

tends to the exercise of cruelty, or the commission of injuries under pretence of punishing them, has been attended with the most beneficial effects. The spirit of christianity introduced virtues into the world the best calculated, not only to prevent the growth of oppression and every species of injury and malice, but to promote the best temper and disposition of mind that human nature is capable of maintaining. Yet let it be remembered, that the laws and obligations of the holy gospel are not merely negative, such as serve only to prevent misery and disorder in society, without doing farther good; while the heart is restrained from the indulgence of passions that lead to acts of cruelty and violence, it is formed to habits of piety, and impressed with sentiments of humanity.

BUT of all other virtues, before the christian dispensation, mankind were most deficient, perhaps, in charity to one another. They seem to have had no idea of

that extensive benevolence which includes the whole world within its bounds, which teaches us to look up to the Almighty, as our common Father, and to consider him as the protector and upholder of all things. These exalted notions of the Divine Nature, at once so pleasing and flattering to the human mind, were seldom, or never entertained, but by a few men of a studious and philosophical character. For want of annexing this idea of paternity to the Supreme Being, the charity of the heathen world was of an illiberal and contracted nature. All the duties of life and every object of benevolence were confined within their own tribe, or the particular district of country in which they lived. They were ever ready, indeed, to diffuse the rancorous passions of the heart; while those amiable virtues which endear us to each other, were choked by selfishness, by pride, or a despicable ambition. Whenever the fire of resentment was kindled, their neighbours immediately caught the flame; acts of violence and

hostility

hostility were continually multiplied, and the world was filled with rapine, slaughter, and devastation. Those who are but mere sciolists in history, but particularly in that of the middle ages of Europe, during the feudal system of government, and before the gospel was understood, will readily admit the truth of these observations.

It was an office well worthy the divine ministry of him, at whose birth peace was proclaimed on earth, to check the rage of these fierce, disorderly passions, and to form the temper of man to mildness, moderation, charity and love. That he has done it, both by precept and example, every one, who is in the least acquainted with the holy gospel, will fully acknowledge. Such views of the Divine Being, such heavenly precepts for the foundation of piety and virtue, and such examples to enforce the practice of them, no other system ever presented. Whether we have, to the utmost of our power, profited by these divine blessings, is another consideration.

deration. I have only insisted on what the gospel teaches, not what mankind pursue. Though I am far from entertaining the gloomy idea that the world is in a degenerate state; I am, indeed, convinced that we are in a state of improvement, and that the progress of virtue has been very considerable among ourselves, since we have renounced the authority of that infamous and prostituted church, which hath so degraded the dignity, and perverted the doctrines of christianity.

THE many comfortable asylums that have been erected, and are voluntarily maintained for the wretched of every description, will remain as monuments of our charity and munificence, to the latest period of time. And though it is, in some measure, too true, that vice of almost every kind abounds among us; yet let us hope, that we are gradually “*pressing on,*” as the holy apostle says, “*towards the mark,*” and making our lives more conformable to the law of Christ.

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Let us hope that the odious vices of oppression, cruelty and injustice, together with the gloomy passions of malice, hatred and revenge, are vanishing away, before the glorious light of the gospel, and that their corresponding virtues and graces are dawning on us, like the rising morn, with increasing lustre.

THUS have I endeavoured, as a subject proper for our consideration, at this solemn season, to shew you how the birth of our Lord was attended with good-will to man. To close our meditations on the subject, I shall, as briefly as possible, state to you what appears to me the proper disposition of mind to be indulged, and the chief duties that ought to be performed, in celebrating this our great festival.

WITH you, who have stedfastly embraced the gospel of Christ, no argument will be necessary to shew that the highest degree of thanksgiving and praise, enlivened by the most exalted love and adoration, is

both necessary, and, indeed, natural to the mind of man, on so great and illustrious an occasion. But, it is not sufficient that we feel these emotions and pious satisfactions; we ought also to indulge them, and express them by some outward act and performance. Now, besides the bare attendance on public worship, what can be so proper as the partaking of the Lord's supper, which, with great propriety, is always administered on this day? Consider, it is the last sacred office, and indeed the only one, which he enjoined his disciples to perform in honor of his memory. "This do," says he, on the eve of his departure from a cruel and wicked world, "in remembrance of me." There is surely nothing arduous or difficult in the performance of it; and the request ought to be regarded with such sentiments of love and piety as nothing can equal, but the pleasure and satisfaction of complying with it. We must not forget too that it is a necessary duty, which is incumbent on all Christians; and when can we perform it, with

with greater propriety, than on the day of our Lord's nativity? Add to the expediency of celebrating this holy communion, that it seems to be the sentiment of nature, and to proceed on other occasions, somewhat similar, from the genuine operations of the heart. Whenever we are endeared to any one in a particular manner, by the ties of nature or affection, we are wont to shew our pleasure and satisfaction arising from the relation, by commemorating the day of their birth. Shall we, then, joyfully and regularly embrace the opportunities, as they offer, of celebrating the day that gave us a parent or a child, and shall we let the nativity of our blessed Lord and Redeemer pass by unnoticed! Let gratitude, devotion, piety and duty forbid it! Independent also of every other motive, there is certainly great comfort in performing "this labor of love," in making a solemn and public profession of our faith, at proper and stated intervals, in supplicating for mercy, and acknowledging the Son of God for our Saviour and our Lord.

THE present season, in consequence of the great event which distinguishes it, has long been dedicated to festivity and joy throughout the christian world. To the greatest heavenly blessings it is natural to unite the comforts which this life affords; and if our pleasures and enjoyments were regulated by the spirit of praise and thanksgiving to Him, "who is the giver of all good gifts," there would be great propriety in them. But I fear, that the sensual indulgence which the occasion offers, is too often admitted with eagerness, and the duties of the day wholly forgotten. To make so solemn a festival as the present, a festival distinguished by heaven's peculiar bounty and good-will to man, a pretence for idleness, for gluttony and intemperance, is an idea so gross and impious, that it must strike every sober mind with indignation and abhorrence. We should certainly feel the highest sensations of joy and satisfaction, but our rejoicing ought to be of the most exalted nature, as well as degree; very different from that noisy and giddy mirth which

which generally arises in “the house of
“feasting;” it should always be accom-
panied with acts of hospitality and kind-
ness. While we feel and acknowledge the
divine benevolence to us and to the whole
world, we ought to imitate the glorious
example, as far as we have ability, by shew-
ing our love to our fellow-creatures.

LET our joy then spring from the no-
blest affections. Let it be influenced by
gratitude to God and charity to man. Let
it shew itself on all occasions, but parti-
cularly the present, in the exercise of those
important duties of a christian’s profession.
Let us be ready to offer our alms and
thanksgivings at the altar of the Lord,
and contribute our mite with chearfulness,
“to feed the hungry and cloath the
“naked.” To make our behaviour in
every respect worthy of this great solemnity,
and to inspire dispositions of mind suitable
to it, let us remember, that “unto us a
“child is born, unto us a son is given,
“whose name was to be called Wonder-
“ful,

“ful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the
“everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace!”
This is the day on which this grand and
awful prophecy was fulfilled, and this is
the day, on which the heavenly host cele-
brated the event, by singing, “Glory to
“God in the highest, on earth peace,
“good-will towards men!”

S E R-

S E R M O N XVIII.

ON THE DUTIES OF YOUTH.

I T I M. iv. 12.

—*Let no man despise thy youth.*

IT appears from this passage that Timothy was but young, when his venerable brother, St. Paul, was by his admonition and instruction, qualifying him for a teacher of the holy gospel. For an office so important, and at the same time so difficult, the season of youth was by no means the best adapted. He was engaging in the propagation of a system which required the utmost rectitude of conduct, joined to the most patient perseverance, in order to oppose

pose the vices and prejudices, and to support the cruelty and oppression, of a wicked and corrupted world. In proportion too, as the doctrines of the blessed Jesus were distinguished for their superior excellence, the errors, and even the frailties, of those who taught them became more conspicuous. While, also, to the admonitions of the aged we are disposed to listen, as to truths that have received the sanction of experience, we turn with indifference from what a younger teacher may have to offer, from a conviction that his early years subject him, at least, to the imputation of ignorance, if not of vice. But the natural disqualification of youth is not insurmountable; since the precept of the text shews, that it is POSSIBLE for a young man to be the instructor of others, and the rare example of Timothy proved it PRACTICABLE also.

NOT to dwell on the exemplary conduct, the shining talents, the steady virtues and the pure devotion which must have so
eminently

eminently distinguished this young apostle, I shall endeavour to shew what perfections of character are requisite, not particularly in those who have undertaken the laudable, though often ungrateful task of teaching others, but in young men in general, that “no man may despise their youth.”

AMONG the good qualities of the young which first discover themselves, and which we regard as the sure indications of every thing excellent in morals, are a nice sense of what is good and what is evil, what is truly praise-worthy, and what is not, with an early and earnest attention to the forming of their principles. Those, indeed, who from their inexperience, their juvenile ardor and want of reflection, are often exposed to the most dangerous temptations, cannot store the mind too soon with those maxims which are the safeguards of innocence, nor direct their attention too early to the acquisition of those habits of thinking, and that steadiness of conduct, from which, when united with religion, every thing

thing that is great, good and amiable must proceed.

WHEN embarked on the ocean of life, innumerable dangers will surround them, and various afflictions, under the specious forms of pleasure, will assail their hearts. To rush blindly on, in a course so perilous, without either the benefits of experience, or the guidance of wisdom, must quickly lead to misery and ruin. It is a duty, therefore, which we owe both to ourselves, our neighbour and our God, when we first acquire the power of reflection, to “ponder the path of life,” and meditate on “the race which is set before us,” with the most steadfast and serious attention. Not to dwell, in this place, on the high commands of Heaven, that enjoin an early course of piety and virtue, as peculiarly acceptable to the Deity, we should consider that, at this critical age, the character takes its cast, perhaps, for ever. The proneness of the human heart to evil, the violence of temptation, and the frail virtues of those, who

who have nothing to boast of but good dispositions, are generally acknowledged in others, and sometimes felt within ourselves. No small care, therefore, will be necessary to be negatively good, merely "to abstain from evil:" but to make any considerable advances towards perfection, the greatest vigilance and caution, united with the best endeavours, under the holy discipline of our Redeemer's laws, are indispensable, and therefore positively required.

IN this arduous enterprize, when we are pressing on to the glorious mark of immortality, through difficulties and dangers, through the perplexing paths of sorrow, and the more pleasing, though no less bewildering fields of joy, to take the broad road that leads to destruction, at our first onset, is dreadful and alarming. One false step brings on another, till vice becomes habitual, and ruin inevitable; or should the soul, roused by the awful admonitions of religion, shudder at the threatening

threatening prospect, the return to virtue will be more difficult. Not only the frailties and evil propensities inherent in the heart of a man must be combated with patient fortitude and vigorous perseverance, but the painful path of error must be trodden back ; the sneers of vicious companions must be disregarded ; the scoffing of fools despised, and the mind thoroughly cleansed, if possible, from every impurity contracted during the habits of careless indifference, or avowed wickedness.

WHILE such considerations, among many others that might be adduced, shew the importance and necessity of subjecting the passions to the early discipline of virtue, and the whole heart and soul to the needful restraints of religion, we cannot but reflect on the too general neglect of this fundamental duty in young persons, with sorrow and regret. How often do we see them follow the giddy impetuosity of their temper, without acknowledging any restraint that would curtail them of the most
frivolous,

frivolous, and sometimes the most vicious pleasures! How often do we observe sin establishing her firm dominion over their hearts, under the fallacious appearance of innocent indulgence, or harmless amusements! And how often do we see a headstrong temper, impatient of control, when it most needs it, burst from the wholesome restriction of paternal authority, and run into every irregularity, from the evil example of others, perhaps, or the dangerous “folly of trusting too much in their own hearts!”

BUT to descend from general reflections to the discussion of a few particular subjects, permit me to observe, that too great confidence in our own strength is always dangerous, and sometimes fatal. In the catalogue of good qualities, therefore, which distinguish the young, we particularly expect to find that virtue which we term MODESTY; but which the scripture comprehends under the distinct expressions of meekness, gentleness and “humbleness

“ of mind.” There are sufficient motives to enforce the observance of these christian graces in men of all ages ; but in youth many additional considerations render them indispensable duties. Those who can have had but little time, and less opportunity, to gain any well-grounded information on important subjects ; who are not only liable to be misled by their heat of temper, but are in continual danger of being seduced from truth and virtue by the fantastic forms of novelty or fashion ; who to the want of experience are often forced to confess the want of reflection also, should surely be on all occasions ready to distrust themselves, and pay some deference to the sentiments of others. This consideration alone, if suffered to have its due weight, would cast an amiable color over their whole behaviour, and kindle those ingenuous blushes of shame, which, on proper occasions, we all wish to see, and which we are all so ready to admire.

BUT

BUT modesty in youth should be a natural virtue ; it should be derived from other, more abundant sources than mere reflection, or a sense of propriety ; it should spring spontaneously from sensibility ; from a heart alive to every sentiment of shame, before it has been hackneyed in the ways of men, or rendered callous by a long intercourse with the world.

THEY who can mix in every society with equal ease, and expose themselves to the imputation of ignorance or impudence without a blush; who can indulge the paltry temptation to licentious raillery, or indecent conversation, and give others pain, without feeling a portion of it themselves, are either men to whom nature has denied every delicacy of sentiment; or in whose minds, the emotions of shame have been so often excited, that they are no longer felt.

FOR youth therefore to want modesty, is
not only to want sensibility, but, in a great
D d 2 measure,

measure, all those endearing qualities, with which it is so intimately blended. As for that artificial consequence, and that boyish importance which some have been taught to acquire, in direct violence to nature, and the genuine dictates of the heart, it is in young persons always disgusting, if not always vicious.

BUT in morals and religion, as in every thing else, there are certain boundaries, where truth and error, virtue and vice begin to blend, like light and darkness on the horizon of the globe. Hence it is in some measure necessary, that the limits, at least of every MIDDLE virtue (if I may so express myself) should be defined, that its nature may be better understood, and the extent of its obligations fully known. Some may suppose that the cultivation of modesty, as one of the characteristic virtues and chief ornaments of youth, is attended with a servile submission, that is both pusillanimous and degrading. Very far from it. True modesty is as distinct
from

from every thing that is abject and mean, as the magnanimity of a hero is from the blustering rage of a coward. It is only a becoming veil, thrown by nature over the good qualities of the mind, before they have reached maturity, that they may appear at length in greater beauty and fuller perfection. And so far is modesty from being incompatible with true dignity, that it forms no inconsiderable part of it. Associated with good dispositions, and ennobled by a sense of conscious worth, it becomes a virtue of the most exalted nature.

THOUGH we may be often witnesses to a degree of awkward shame in the uncultivated minds of youth, that is extremely painful to others and embarrassing to themselves ; yet we should not forget, that such are the rude materials of virtue, which are the proper objects of cultivation ; wherever we find them, we should regard them as rough diamonds, that sufficiently speak their intrinsic value, and only require the

D d 3 artist's

artist's needful hand to shew them in their full lustre. We may be assured that the lively sense of shame, which often causes such confusion in the mind, is always an indication of good intentions, and a desire of acting right in those who feel it, if they only knew how. As for the wretch that blushes at the impurity of his own thoughts, that hangs his head from the consciousness of a mean and groveling disposition, and walks as it were in darkness with the light of heaven around him, the emotions of his mind are more nearly allied to the overwhelming sense of guilt, than to that amiable virtue which I wish at present to inculcate.

SUFFER me to close these observations by recommending modesty to youth, in its proper and enlarged sense, not only as a duty, but as the chief ornament of the mind. Its importance, indeed, does not consist immediately in itself, abstractedly considered, so much as in the influence which it communicates, and the protection
which

which it affords to other virtues. The meekness which the tenor of the holy gospel throughout inculcates, and which the precepts and example of St. Paul so strongly enforce, is of this nature; and is always mentioned as giving a grace, and adding importance, to every benevolent action. Besides, the emotions that arise from an ingenuous modesty, will often make us shrink from temptation, and preserve our hearts from the corruption of vice, when reflection and a regard to principle would prove ineffectual. United with a proper sense of worth, and freed from false shame, it forms the most amiable prepossession of character, and one of the most powerful attractions that a young person can possess.

BUT though we wish to observe its influence on the whole conduct and behaviour of youth, yet we wish more particularly to see it regulate their intercourse, and govern their conversation with the aged. This intercourse, indeed, as it is seldom cultivated from choice, is generally con-

fin'd to the company of their parents ; who are certainly entitl'd not only to all the respect that is due from modesty, but all the deference that springs from duty, gratitude and natural affection. To see the least symptoms of insolence of manner, or coarseness of behaviour, in a relation of life so intimate, and which ought, on both sides, to be so endearing, is beyond measure shocking and disgusting. Whatever vices arise from a brutal disposition of mind, an unlimited indulgence of selfish passions, or a total want of tenderness and feeling, we might expect to find in one, who is capable of behaving ill to a FATHER OR A MOTHER.

BUT let us now direct our attention to a subject of greater importance, and which more intimately concerns our innocence and peace. The wise and beneficent Creator of the world hath distinguished his rational creatures by various intellectual endowments, which sufficiently proclaim the superiority of man over the rest of the creation,

creation, and point him out as the peculiar object of moral discipline here, and of divine reward hereafter. We can boast, in an eminent degree, of the nice, discriminating faculties of thought, reason, conscience and reflection, that were given us to ascertain good from evil, and to discern, with sufficient truth, the path that leads to virtue and happiness.

THE passions also, which in the brute creation are little more than the instincts of their nature, were planted in our bosoms for the wisest and best of purposes. By their salutary operation the current of life is prevented from stagnating. They give energy to our thoughts, and vigor to our pursuits. By their intermediate agency the knowledge of goodness is often associated with the practice of it. To the sentiments of virtue they communicate additional warmth, and, when under due regulation, they add to our religious principles such exaltation of mind, as raises our thoughts above this world, and directs our
attention

attention to that "crown of glory which
"fadeth not away," as the last, and most
important object of all human hope.

BUT while we ascribe these and many
other blessed effects to the influence of the
passions, when under proper government,
and due subordination to the guidance of
reason, and the directing voice of religion,
we must not forget that, from their per-
version and disorder, springs vice of every
kind, and misery in every hideous and
guilty form.

IN youth, therefore, a season when these
great movers of the mind generally operate
without any direction, but the blind im-
pulses of nature, and little control, but
from their own counter-action; the go-
vernment of the passions must form a duty
of the last importance; a duty on which
their happiness or misery, not only in this
world, but in that which is to come, will,
in a great measure, be suspended. Nor is
this the sentiment of reason only, but of
revelation

revelation also; for there we are commanded to “keep the heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.”

IN endeavouring to recommend this important obligation both of virtue and religion, to the attention of young persons, I shall not expatiate on that horrid depravity and perversion of mind which lead to crimes of the deepest dye; which actuate the persecuting tyrant, the felon, or the murderer; but will confine myself to such propensities as lead us almost insensibly to evil, and to such frailties in the human bosom, as are often associated with a beneficent temper and amiable dispositions.

AMONG the more innocent excesses of youthful passions, and the less dangerous delusions of the mind, we may rank the extravagancies of hope and expectation. Before we have had the painful, but wholesome lessons of experience impressed upon
our

our hearts, we view the scenes of life, through the deceitful medium of imagination, with pure, unmixed delight. We look forward, with eager joy, to the hour that frees us from restraint, and brings with it the gratification of our wishes. Visions of pleasure sport before our eyes, in a thousand gay, fantastic forms; we anticipate the bliss which is to come, and “re-
“joice to run our course.” But these pleasing dreams of happiness should not be indulged too far; reason should teach us, in our earlier years, that this world is a mixture of good and evil; a school of needful discipline, in which we are trained up to the “high calling of Christ Jesus,” and formed to virtue by combating the ills, and enduring the afflictions of life. Were it possible, by arguments directed to the understanding, or sentiments addressed to the heart, to communicate to others those truths which are derived from experience and an enlarged state of mind, such reflections would often allay, if not prevent the miseries of disappointment, and youth
would

would soon learn the vanity of human wishes.

BUT the loss of some distant good, however heightened by the powers of imagination, or over-rated by the blind partiality of our hearts, is by no means the only, or most important evil, that springs from this vain exaltation of the mind. From being so long conversant with imaginary happiness, we lose our relish for that which is real. Many are the comforts of life that will be disregarded ; instead of acknowledging with thankfulness the blessings which we already enjoy, we shall be apt to indulge the murmurs of discontent that we do not possess more. Thus will the disorders of the imagination often encroach upon our religious duties, and make us forgetful of that all-gracious Being, whose wisdom and whose mercy should, at all times, “ fill
“ our hearts with food and gladness.”

THE mind also, soured with disappointment, and irritated by repeated vexations,
becomes

becomes incapable of sharing in the social intercourses of life. The man whose whole attention is engrossed by the imaginary cares and restless anxiety which agitate his own bosom, and which spring only from romantic wishes and ill-grounded expectations, is but ill-qualified to perform the offices of friendship, or to fulfil the mild duties of charity and benevolence. He feels too much for HIMSELF to be interested in the happiness of OTHERS ; and as he undervalues the common BLESSINGS, so he overlooks the ordinary ILLS of life.

SUCH wandering wishes, and such extravagancies of the mind, united with the giddy folly and inexperience of youth, first tend to disappointment and chagrin. If not timely corrected by reflection and the sacred admonitions of religion, they overwhelm the soul with misery and discontent, and at length terminate in the churlish dispositions of misanthropy.

Should

Should these ardent, though ill-founded hopes, ever happen to be cherished by fortunate evens, or lucky accidents, they may produce a course of action, more pleasing, indeed, but by no means less dangerous. Kindled into ambition, the disorder is no longer confined within our own bosoms. Whatever obstructs the progress of a passion, neither governed by religious motives, nor regulated by a regard to true virtue, must suffer by its violence. The man who is agitated by restless vanity, or wild desires, if in an humble station, generally scatters misery through the small circle of domestic life. What slaughter and destruction ambition has produced in kings and emperors, the historian of an Alexander, and the vain, though elegant Commentaries of a Cæsar sufficiently declare. To guard the heart, therefore, against these wild excesses of juvenile ardor is a duty to which youth should direct their early attention, if they wish that the season of life, which we are naturally disposed to regard with indulgent affection, should not be deservedly despised,

by incurring the imputation of folly and extravagance, vice and sin.

AT the same time that they should take particular care to avoid the many false and artificial notions of life, which we are but too eager to embrace with blind credulity, (and which, for that reason, indeed, the fanciful writers of romance are but too apt to communicate) they ought to acquire those enlarged ideas of men and things, which have their foundation in TRUTH; and, in some measure, supply the want of experience by habits of thought and reflection.

ABOVE all, they should have recourse to the blessed gospel of our Lord and Saviour, Christ, and deeply impress their hearts with those divine truths which illumine the natural mind of man, as the rays of the sun enlighten the globe. We should there learn, at every age, to rest our hopes on a more lasting foundation than the enjoyments of this world, and to "place our affections on " things above." We should there be taught,
that

that they who greedily long for riches and honors are often “pierced through with
“ many sorrows ; but that they who hun-
“ ger and thirst after righteousness shall
“ be filled.” From the same blessed source of divine knowledge and heavenly comfort, we should derive that contentment, which, when united with godliness, is the greatest blessing we can possibly enjoy ; a blessing which properly understood, and diligently improved, makes every comfort that meets us in the variegated paths of life felt at the heart ; and to every instance of divine bounty, associates the sentiments of piety and the affections of gratitude.

WHAT I would next warn young persons against, is an inordinate love of pleasure. This is a frailty which in them we treat with some indulgence, as it proceeds from the strong propensities of nature. We can reflect, that the scenes of life have not yet by frequent repetition palled upon their senses ; that the lively sensations of delight, arising from early gratifications,

are not yet much abated; that the world has still many allurements to attract their attention; and that passion not only operates sooner, but with greater efficacy than reason and reflection. But though we candidly admit these considerations as an excuse, in some degree, for the inordinate love of pleasure, yet they must by no means be urged as a justification of it. Instead of idle gratifications and unlimited indulgence, the laws of nature, the plan of Providence, and the voice of reason have allotted to the early period of our existence duties, of all others the most important, and perhaps the most difficult to perform.

IN the very infancy of reason, when wisdom begins to dawn upon our minds, we are directed to look forward to something that is TO COME; and to prepare ourselves, either in a more enlarged, or confined sense, for a state of futurity. And this we are taught not only from internal reflection, but from sensible objects also.

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The husbandman, if he expects that his fields should yield him fruit in autumn, must not let the spring, however pleasing, pass away without labor in idle enjoyments. If the shrub is to be formed to beauty, or the plant brought to perfection, the necessary care and cultivation must be bestowed on them when they are young. Youth, therefore, is the time for labor, industry and improvement.

To descend to particulars in order to illustrate the matter before us, at what season of life shall we be likely to acquire knowledge, if we do not begin when the painful sense of ignorance is felt most sensibly, and when we have strength, spirits and capacity for toiling up the steep of learning? When shall we endeavour to form our principles, if not at a time when to go wrong once is, perhaps, to continue so for ever; and when the good dispositions of the heart are neither thwarted by obstinate prejudices, nor corrupted by vicious habits? And when, when shall we

cultivate the amiable duties and rational enjoyments of life, the pleasing satisfactions of virtuous friendship, and the mutual endearments of relationship, if not at that period, when we are formed by nature for entering into these pleasing obligations with ardor and affection, and when the sanctions of reason and religion are strengthened by the feelings of the heart? All these great and beneficial ends are notwithstanding interrupted, and often neglected, from the immoderate love of pleasure.

NOR is it the cause only of negative evil, in checking the progress of virtue, and preventing the improvement of the mind; it seldom fails of bringing with it that which is positive also. Not to dwell particularly on the frequent loss of fortune, health and reputation, let me observe, that in the cup of pleasure, vice generally mingles her subtlest poison. The draught becomes more palatable, it is true, but no less destructive. In the giddy hours of joyous festivity and noisy mirth, we are often familiarized with
moral

moral impurity, under the disguise of wit and humor; qualities which the holy apostle meant to express, perhaps, by the moderate, though significant terms, “filly talking and jesting.” These are the moments in which the feeble outworks of virtue and religion (if there be any) are broken down, and the dominion of vice secretly established. Often do our hearts, almost insensibly, receive the taint of corruption from the example and evil communications of others; from men who can associate the most dangerous vices, perhaps, with the most pleasing accomplishments; who though wicked, dissolute and abandoned, have not lost the power of pleasing; but who can recommend themselves to our admiration by the brightness of their talents, and throw over every deformity the splendid veil of genius. Such are the delusive appearances in which “sin doth so easily beset us,” when we should be shocked at the hideousness of her naked form, and when, conscious of our own integrity, we should blush to be guilty of any thing that is mean, dissolute or wicked.

WE might easily proceed to enumerate a variety of irregular and dangerous indulgences which spring from a passion for pleasure, were not some too gross, and others too frivolous to be particularized in this place, and shew how often they tend to debase the understanding and corrupt the heart: but the observations which have been made on general topics may be easily applied to particulars; and those who are not disposed, of themselves, to cultivate rectitude of conduct, both in morals and religion, from the reflection of their own minds, when once the fallacious appearances of vice are exposed, and the paths of virtue laid open, are not likely to be prevailed on, either by the multiplied precepts, or the sententious dogmas of others.

It will be urged, however, that frequent amusement and relaxation are necessary to preserve the vigor of the mind, and the health of the body. They are so. But the efficacy, the propriety, and even the innocence of these, as of every thing else,

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consist

consist in their moderation and a prudent choice. The fatigues of the student and sedentary man require the needful refreshments of exercise, and, perhaps, the occasional enjoyment of innocent diversions; such, however, as do not familiarize spectacles of cruelty to animals, or lessen the dignity of human nature, by representing it in an odious and degrading light. There are, indeed, amusements of an elegant and liberal cast; such as a cultivated mind may sometimes indulge itself in, with pleasure and advantage. What these are good sense and a steady regard to virtue, even in hours of recreation, will point out to every one's taste, with much more propriety than another can do. As to the fashionable pleasures of the age, to speak generally, and to use the mildest expression, they can only be considered as a sort of splendid idleness; or, to apply the bold antithesis of an ancient, as wandering from place to place, and searching after happiness in "ACTIVE SLOTH."

SUFFER me to conclude by observing, that every age and condition brings with it, besides the ordinary obligations of virtue and religion, certain peculiar and appropriate duties; duties to which young persons must diligently attend, if they wish that "no man should despise their youth," and which the aged must duly cultivate and regularly practise, if they would have "the hoary head found in the way of righteousness," and revered as "a crown of glory." There are also a thousand secondary graces of character, which must be studied, and a thousand indirect modes of temptation to be guarded against, if we wish to maintain respectability of character, and to make any considerable advances towards perfection.

THE abstaining from murder, adultery, absolute theft, and wilful perjury, is only following the express laws of nature, and complying with the positive institutions of society. It is only, in a religious sense, treasuring up the talent which was given
us,

us, and returning it, like the unprofitable servant, without addition or improvement. Much more will be required of us, as disciples of the blessed Jesus, in order to make us accepted of the Father. The duties of a christian are not of a negative, but a positive nature. They require active benevolence, as well as an exemption from crimes. The presumptuous Pharisee, you will remember, was not justified before God, though he fasted twice in a week, paid tithes of all that he possessed, and was neither an extortioner, an unjust man, or an adulterer. Nor was the Jewish ruler perfect, who told our Lord that he had kept the whole law of God, as expressed in the positive commandments of the second table, even from his youth up. He wanted one thing ; charity, and active benevolence to man. In these the whole circle of the social virtues are comprehended ; in these the perfection of a christian consists ; and these were wanting, it seems, to render him a disciple of Christ, and to secure his eternal salvation.

S E R-

S E R M O N X I X .

ON THE GOODNESS AND THE MERCY
OF GOD.

P S A L M ciii. 14.

*For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth
that we are dust.*

WHATEVER serves to withdraw our attention from sensual enjoyments and worldly pursuits, by fixing it on objects of higher importance, advances the dignity of human nature, and is a source of the purest felicity. The claims of the powerful and wealthy to superior happiness are often ill-founded; and their gratifications sometimes spring wholly from vanity and pride. Even the more temperate
rate

rate pleasures, which result from the cultivation of science, and the sportive creations of fancy, are not altogether without the mixture of human infirmity. They are, at best, but imperfect blessings, liable to be interrupted, if not destroyed, by a variety of accidents, and other comforts are always necessary to render the enjoyment of them permanent. But if there be in this world any felicity, which a rational and virtuous mind might deem perfect, and free from every alloy, it is that which a christian derives from the glorious and exalted truths of religion; truths which declare to us, that we are the probationary subjects of Divine Providence, and the children of that all-gracious God, “ in
“ whom we live, and move, and have our
“ being.”

INSIGNIFICANT as a human creature might appear, when we consider the wonders of the creation, the regions of infinite space, in which the heavenly bodies are continually performing their revolutions,
and

and other glorious effects of the divine agency, we may be sufficiently assured, that not a single individual is either neglected, or overlooked in the immensity of God's works. That omniscience which "formed the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth," can, at one glance, pervade all nature, and the Deity is, at all times, and in all situations, essentially present to every intellectual being. "When, therefore, we consider the heavens, the moon and stars, O Lord, which thou hast ordained," we might ask, with David, "what is man that thou art so mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him?" But when we consider the divine attributes of thy Majesty, and that "Thou rejoicest in the works of thy hands," we might be assured, that "Thou knowest our down-sitting and our uprising, and understandest our thoughts afar off." Not only the guilty wretch, who trembles at the rebuke of conscience, but the righteous also, who have suffered their share of sor-

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row and calamity, during their sojourning here, may "lift up their hearts to the Almighty Father," and ask, with the inspired Psalmist, "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" The former might shrink with terror from the remembrance of his crimes, when he reflects that he lives and acts under the eye of an all-just and all-seeing God; the latter might dwell on the same thought with inexpressible pleasure and satisfaction, as a source of comfort which can never be exhausted, but which becomes more abundant, as well as more delightful, in proportion as other blessings fade and die away. The pious man, far from regarding his Maker with terror and dismay, has cause to look up to Him with the greatest confidence. When he addresses his prayers to heaven, the effusions of his heart will speak the language of peace, security and adoration. Though the snares of the wicked compass him round about, and the storm of affliction falls heavily upon him; yet will he express himself, when he pours out his
soul

soul to the Author of all being, in such words as divine wisdom hath inspired. “ My goodness, and my fortress ; my high tower, and my deliverer ; my shield, and He in whom I trust !” These are the titles which, in moments of serious and devout meditation, as well as in the time of trouble, he will with grateful piety, offer to his Maker.

Nothing can possibly serve to mitigate the anguish of sorrow so effectually, and nothing can so much contribute to the excellence of human nature in this world, as the belief that we are always under the superintending care of the all-bountiful Creator of the universe, and enjoy the distinguished privilege of looking up to Him, for succour and protection, in every difficulty and distress of life.

A DUE consideration of this our relation to the Almighty, and our dependence on his mercies, will reconcile us also to the various afflictions, which He might think it necessary for us to suffer. Provided we endeavour to keep our hearts as free as possible

possible from the pollutions of sin, by embracing, with thankfulness, the means which have been graciously afforded us of "growing wise unto salvation," what have we to fear, while we journey through this vale of misery and shadow of death? Arduous and painful as the warfare of life might be, we are confident that neither powers nor principalities, tribulation nor afflictions, can long separate the righteous from Him, "in whose presence there is "fulness of joy."

WHEN, indeed, we reflect that we have omniscience for our guide, and omnipotence for our defence, we might, in imitation of our blessed Lord's apostles, even "glory in our sufferings." We might consider them only as useful trials of virtue, and salutary exercises of the soul, in its progress towards perfection. Many are the divine comforts which result from considering ourselves as the children of the Most High, in every situation of life, but chiefly in a state of sorrow and calamity. We
may

may admit the necessity of difficulties and dangers, of temptation and trial, in order to constitute a life of discipline. We might reflect, that our very griefs are sometimes blended with such satisfactions as the more fortunate might envy; and believe, with adoration, that “they who sow in tears, shall reap in joy.”

WHEN once the affections are calmed by these pious and devout meditations, fresh sources of comfort will also spring up in the mind. We shall consider, in the first place, that the experience of sorrow and calamity enlarges the bounds of that inestimable knowledge, which teaches us how to live and how to die; that it gives us not only better, but juster opinions of our fellow-creatures, and brings us acquainted with the nature of our own hearts. We shall be persuaded, also, that it dispels the airy visions of fancy, and removes the veil of ignorance and self-love; that it kindles the generous spark of sympathy in our hearts; awakens, and

perhaps creates, the mild and amiable virtues of candor, charity and benevolence; and that over the whole soul and disposition it diffuses a gentleness and complacency, which are scarcely to be derived from any other source. Add to all this, that it produces in us habits of reflection, sets us seriously about the important task of forming our principles, regulating our passions, and weaning our affections from the things of this world. To the exercises of devotion it gives additional fervor, and, by contrasting the vanities and vexations of all sublunary enjoyments with the solid satisfactions of christian piety, teaches us to look beyond this world, and build our happiness chiefly on the mercy and the goodness of God. From a knowledge that these are the salutary effects of sorrow on the human mind, Solomon asserted, that “ it is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting ;” and that, “ by the sadness of the countenance, the heart is made better.”

BUT

BUT besides that this warfare is necessary to train us up to "the high calling of Christ Jesus," we may observe, that it is no less needful to teach us the value of those blessings which providence has conferred upon us in this life. The man who never knew adversity, cannot well fix a proper estimate on the prosperity which he might experience. Some share of the former is as necessary to the true enjoyment of the latter, as the gloomy rigor of the winter is to render the return of spring more pleasing. A thousand comforts meet the prosperous in the circle of domestic life, which are wholly disregarded, or never remembered with gratitude; but which would notwithstanding, fill the heart of one who has "eaten the bread of sorrows," with joy and satisfaction, "with food and gladness."

BESIDES, we may consider the afflictions of the virtuous as pledges of future happiness. Perhaps, they might be even requisite to the perfection of immortal bliss.

If we admit that the consciousness of our present state is to exist hereafter, and there seems to be but little reason to suppose otherwise, we cannot but believe, that the poor, afflicted Lazarus, for instance, had a fuller enjoyment of the blessedness of heaven, than if he had been "clothed in purple," while on earth, "and fared sumptuously every day." However this may be, we are assured, from the whole tenor of the gospel, that "virtue is made perfect by suffering;" and that "they who weep now, shall be comforted hereafter."

FARTHER, when we consider that "the great and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity," is present also to the meanest wretch in creation, and "heareth all those who call upon him faithfully," we cannot be said, in our afflictions, to be "like those who sorrow without hope." He who in his tears, his lamentations and complaints, considers that the wisest, the best and most powerful of Beings is privy to

to his sufferings, watches over the anguish of his heart, and knows that he will so ordain the circumstances of his life, that they shall all ultimately work together for good, will scarcely envy the powerful or the wealthy, the prosperous or the proud, “ who walk as it were in a vain shadow, “ and disquiet themselves in vain ; nor “ know the things which pertain unto “ their peace.”

HAVING thus far spoken of the superintendence of the Supreme Being over his intelligent creatures, let us now consider Him in that point of view in which the words of the text describe him. As our wise and powerful, but kind and merciful judge. As one that will hereafter most assuredly bring us to judgment, and make manifest the hidden counsels of the heart ; but yet as one, “ who knoweth our frame, “ who remembereth that we are dust.”

ON this important subject we are almost entirely indebted to divine revelation, for

those rational and comfortable truths in religion which we now enjoy. The vice and depravity, perhaps, as well as the fears and superstitions of unenlightened man, taught him to believe, that the Creator of the world delighted in vengeance, and that the most rigid justice and inexorable power surrounded his throne. Sacrifice and oblation, with such ineffectual prayers as the dangers, the successes and calamities of this life prompted, were the only means that the wisdom of the world could devise for appeasing his wrath, and averting the dreadful judgments of his incensed Majesty. Human reason seems to have been unable to gain even the elements of revelation in this particular. Seldom, or never, is the Almighty represented
“ as long-suffering and of great goodness;
“ as forgiving iniquities, and crowning
“ the repentant sinner with loving kindness and tender mercies; as slow to
“ anger, and pitying those that fear him,
“ as a father pitieth his children :” The imagination of the heathen poet and philosopher

osopher delighted to paint Him, as the God that was armed with the thunderbolt of vengeance ; as the awful, unrelenting Power that consigned all to the gloomy regions of Tartarus, who dared to transgress his commands, and that rejoiced more “ in the greatness of his might,” than in the power of conferring happiness, or relieving misery.

SUCH notions, imperfect as they are in themselves, were blended with absurdities so gross, and impurities so shocking, that we cannot be too thankful for the superior light which has been vouchsafed us, in these latter times ; in which “ God, who “ in divers manners spake,” though not fully, “ by the prophets, hath spoken to “ us by his Son.” The Almighty Father, indeed, whose attributes of wisdom and of power so far transcend the faculties and conception of the human mind, could never be truly, or worthily conceived, by the assistance of unenlightened reason.

Lost in uncertainty, and oppressed with the idea of a Being so awfully great, sublime and powerful, we must ever have remained ignorant, or at least doubtful, of the nature of his perfections, and the dispensations of his providence, if we had not “access to him through the mediation of his only-begotten Son.” From the gracious revelation of his will, manifested to us in the holy gospel, we are assured, that “if any man sin, we have “an Advocate with the Father, Jesus “Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins.” Though also after every earnest endeavour we may come far short of that life of holiness, that godly simplicity and sincerity, which are exhibited for our imitation in the life and conversation of Him, who was enabled to “fulfil “the will of his Father in all things;” though the best of us have abundant occasion to say, when we sum up the merit of our actions, and place them in opposition to our misdeeds, that “we are unprofit-
“able

“able servants;” yet the words of the text inform us, that our heavenly Father “knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust.” Blessed truth! source of inexhaustible comfort to poor, offending, as well as afflicted mortals, and truly worthy of Him, who is, indeed, “the God of all comfort!” When torn by the conflict of contending passions, when surprised by sudden and unexpected temptations, when betrayed from weakness, or misled by ignorance, we transgress his high commands, and violate the eternal laws of virtue and of truth, he mercifully forbears to bring destruction on us—“He desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live”—still he invites us into the arms of Divine mercy, “considereth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust!”

FROM this distinguished attribute of the Divine love, we derive further comfort and satisfaction in our intercourse with

the world. The omniscient Creator that fashioned us can penetrate into the inmost recesses of the heart. He will always bear witness to those good intentions which were frustrated, perhaps, by untoward accidents, or by the counteraction of some opposing principle of conduct. He can read and understand the wishes of sincere benevolence, where the power of indulging them is wanting; and in those complications of principle and passion, when the heart is divided in itself, and hurried into dangerous excesses by the generous ardor of virtue, he will make due allowance for human infirmity, and "seeing our merits "in secret," however they may be concealed from others, "will reward them "openly."

It is even possible that we might suffer in the opinion of the world, nay "be persecuted for righteousness sake," when our conduct is viewed with satisfaction and approbation by the Almighty Father of the universe. Benevolent actions directed
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to improper objects, and therefore unsuccessful in their effects, will often be scandalized among men under the name of folly; and a few deviations in conduct from the established practice of others, though suggested by the desire of doing good, and maintained by the consciousness of virtue, might be magnified to errors, and, perhaps, to crimes. Let not this however prevent our continuance in well doing, convinced that there is One who at all times readeth our heart, and will judge righteous judgment.

THESE reflections are more particularly applicable to those who study to follow the paths of christian duty, regardless of the opinion of others, and careful only of maintaining "a conscience void of offence" towards God and towards man." Yet let not the accommodating man of the world deceive himself so far, as to think that he is fulfilling the measure of his moral and religious duty, when he strives, only from vanity and self-love, perhaps, to conciliate
the

the good-will of his fellow-creatures ; but let him remember, that “ the friendship “ of the world is often enmity with God.” By the dexterous arts of flattery and dissimulation, reputation may, for a time, be upheld among men ; and the mean affectation of the more amiable virtues, may be palmed upon the world for the virtues themselves ; but the triumph of hypocrisy and deception is but of short duration ; and every one who has the least sense of religion, or the most distant prospect of another world, should reflect, that as there is a God who sees, and will reward, the hidden virtues and concealed graces of “ the pure “ in heart,” so also the same omnipotent and omniscient Being will punish the secret crimes of the wicked, unmask “ the deceitfulness of sin,” and cause “ the hope “ of the hypocrite to perish.”

WHILE we have thus endeavoured to explain the mercy and the goodness of God, as expressed in the beautiful words of the text, what are the practical improvements that

that we should draw from them? Shall we be more negligent of our duty, and shall our hearts be less affected with gratitude, love and adoration, because our God is a God of mercy? Shall our devotion be less fervent, and our piety less sincere than it would have been, if the Deity were represented, under the Christian dispensation, as inexorable and vindictive, as he was in the corrupt systems of heathen mythology? In a word, to use the bold and expressive language of the apostle, “shall we sin, that grace may abound?—“ God forbid.” But rather let our knowledge of the mercy and the goodness of God, exalt our religious practice to the highest degree of perfection. To all the motives that arise from the fear of incensing omnipotence, let it superadd the shame and remorse, the ingratitude and guilt of offending infinite goodness and infinite perfection. To the more ordinary inducements for worshipping the Father of all mercies, “in spirit and in truth,” let it teach us to unite the most exalted and most pleasing

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ing affections of which the soul is capable ; love, gratitude, adoration and praise. To abuse kindness, to be capable of perverting the wishes of benevolence, and frustrating the endeavours of disinterested friendship, is justly considered among mortals as a mark of the most depraved disposition, and as a crime that merits general detestation. And ought we not to look upon ourselves with much greater abhorrence, if we should ever be guilty of the same against the Lord and giver of life ! against Him who is the source of all comfort, joy and satisfaction, both in this world and that which is to come !

LET us farther learn to imitate the divine benevolence, which has been the subject of our present meditation, in our commerce with the world. As the omnipotent Father, in his dealing with us, condescends to “ remember that we are “ dust,” let us also be ever ready to make due allowance for the frailties of our fellow-creatures. Many are there in the world who, if they have fallen into errors

which we have avoided, possess other good qualities to which we, perhaps, are strangers. In forming our opinion of men and things, we have great need to exercise that "charity which is not easily provoked." We should consider the violence of temptation, and the frailty of our own hearts. Experience, perhaps, might teach us how ineffectual the efforts of virtue are, at all times, to subdue the violence of passion, and to repel the attacks of vice. When we contemplate the strange variety of wretchedness that surround us, and hear the melancholy history of those who have been instrumental in bringing misfortune on their own heads, should we condemn them all, without distinction, as guilty, or as deserving our censure? Certainly not. If we conducted our enquiries, with charitable forbearance, into the nature and causes of their calamity, we should find, that some had been misled by ignorance, or the folly of "trusting too much in their own hearts," and many seduced from the paths of rectitude

tude by temptations, which we ourselves should not have resisted, had chance or providence exposed us to them. Others, again, have become the dupes of passions that originated from vanity and pride; vanity, that sprung, perhaps, from the consciousness of excellence, and pride, easily excited, in weak minds, by the flattery and fawning submission of inferiors. We should perceive, also, that Providence, for purposes not sufficiently apparent to human wisdom, has exposed some to the open world, and endowed them with excellencies that invite the attacks of malice, vice and envy, and shielded others from every shaft, either by making them too mean a mark, or by disposing them in the peaceful habitations of solitude. On all occasions, therefore, when we consider that there is an unavoidable mixture of infirmity with every human virtue, we shall have abundant cause to reverence and obey the precept of the holy apostle, who exhorts us to "be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another even
" as

“ as God, for Christ’s sake, hath for-
“ given us.”

WERE we, indeed, perfect creatures ourselves, and the rest of mankind only workers of iniquity, we might be permitted to assume the authority of judges ; but sinners as we all are, who can open his mouth to censure his neighbour, or slander his brother, without being awed to silence, when he calls to mind the divine precept, “ Judge
“ not, that ye be not judged.” Our blessed Redeemer enforced this admirable rule of conduct on various occasions ; but at no time more forcibly, than when the Jews were going to stone the woman convicted of adultery to death. He did not urge any thing in extenuation of the crime ; but in order to correct their eager zeal for executing justice here, said, “ he that is with-
“ out offence among you, let him first
“ cast a stone at her.” No one but the Great Jehovah to “ whom all hearts are
“ open and all desires known, can judge
“ righteous judgment ;” and in every case,

where the immediate peace of society and the lives of individuals are not concerned, let the errors and imperfections of our fellow-mortals remain, for Him to punish or to pardon, as his unerring wisdom shall direct. Man is often led into error by his ignorance or his infirmity, and frequently betrayed into guilt by the violence of his passions. In no one can we expect to find justice, wisdom and goodness in an infinite degree united, but in that Supreme Being “who knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust.”

S E R M O N XX.

ON FAITH, AS THE RULE OF CONDUCT.

2 C O R. V. 7.

For we walk by faith, not by sight.

THE spirit and the meaning of few words have been more abused, and less understood, perhaps, than that of FAITH. Some have pretended that it means nothing more than simple belief in religious truths, without being blended with any corresponding virtues, or connected with any acts of christian piety. While others have vainly supposed, that under the single article of FAITH, the whole sum of moral

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and religious duty is comprehended. A little consideration might convince us, that both these opinions are erroneous; that the former is by much too narrow and confined; and that the latter is not only wild and extravagant, but dangerous and corrupt.

IF we wish to form true and worthy sentiments of the doctrines of divine revelation, we must read them, and meditate on them, with some share of that candor and godly sincerity with which they were delivered. We must not suffer our opinions to be fettered by a few particular texts, that might be partially selected, and easily perverted; but endeavour, by taking an enlarged view of divine truth, to understand the general sense and spirit of it, as diffused throughout the different parts of the sacred volume. We should then discover, that FAITH is almost invariably connected with mental perfections; with an open and ingenuous disposition; with a temper formed to devotion, and a heart
ready

ready to embrace every opportunity of sanctifying the profession of christianity, by performing its duties. As such it stands opposed to the evil propensities of a suspicious, narrow-minded man; one who is ever ready to cavil and perplex truth, when it in the least interferes with the indulgence of his passions, his worldly interests and pleasures.

IF we examine further, we shall find that FAITH, whenever it is considered as effectual to salvation, not only implies a full reliance on the justice and the mercy of God, but a willing and chearful obedience to his Divine Laws.

FAITH, therefore, is not a mere abstract notion of the understanding, but a practical principle of the heart; otherwise it could not be said, in the language of scripture, “to work by love,” and “to purify the soul from sin.”

BUT lastly, we might consider FAITH, in its most general acceptation, as that rational confidence and belief which we have in God's word, as revealed to us through our blessed Lord, Jesus Christ, from a serious and honest enquiry into the promises and doctrines which it contains. This principle of assent, or acquiescence in the mind, when applied to the objects of religion, is widely different from that expectation which is founded on the mere preponderance of probabilities in human affairs; though it cannot be said to amount to perfect knowledge. It is a calm and steady assurance of the soul; a confidence, under which the virtuous man and the christian is at all times happy. It is "the strong fortress of the righteous," which can neither be shaken by the storms of adversity, nor undermined by the hidden works of darkness.

IMPRESSED with such sentiments of Faith, the Holy Apostle called it, with peculiar force and beauty, "the substance

“ stance of things hoped for, the evidence
“ of things not seen.” Hence also he ob-
serves, that “ we are saved by hope ;” and
proceeds to make this distinction ; “ but
“ hope that is seen, is not hope ; for what
“ a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for
“ it ? But if we hope for that we see not,
“ then do we with patience wait for it.”
In other places, St. Paul represents him-
self, in the hour of calamity, as rejoicing
in hope, and as being always confident in
the promises of his Lord. The kind and
affectionate blessing which he bestowed on
the christian brethren at Rome will serve
to confirm these observations. “ The God
“ of hope fill you,” says he, “ with all
“ joy and peace in believing.” But in or-
der to distinguish this divine principle of
belief from that fickle disposition of mind,
which St. James aptly compares to a
“ wave of the sea driven with the wind
“ and tossed ;” which may prompt a man
“ to ask in faith” to-day, and which may
make him waver in doubt to-morrow ; he
calls it “ a lively and effectual hope, which

“ is set before us, and which we have as
“ an anchor of the soul, both sure and
“ stedfast.”

It is in the sense last explained that we must understand the word FAITH, as used in the text, “ For we walk by
“ FAITH, not by SIGHT.” The contradiction which is here expressed, between two different principles of conduct, will admit of no other interpretation than that of a steady and rational assurance, as opposed to absolute certainty, or sensible demonstration.

THE Deity hath been pleased to make the former our guide and director, not only in spiritual, but in temporal concerns also. But though every dispensation of the Divine Will ought to be received with gratitude and praise, as flowing from the source of infinite wisdom and goodness ; yet because the plans of providence have not been wholly laid open, and exposed to the weak, but prying eye of human reason, many
have

have encouraged in themselves “an evil heart of unbelief;” and when they might, at least, have “seen, through a glass darkly,” all that was necessary for them to see, have perversely shut their eyes, and chosen not to see at all.

A LITTLE meditation will discover to us the folly and ingratitude of such conduct. One might suppose, that they who are capable of being actuated by motives so vain and trifling, had been accustomed, on all occasions, to think and act without difficulties or impediments. One might imagine, that they were raised far above the mists of ignorance and the clouds of error, which hang over human life; and that they looked down from their exalted station, with the complacent dignity of superior beings, on the rest of the human race, who were alone oppressed with cares, embarrassed with doubts, and daily feeling the effects of their weakness, their ignorance or folly. But let them reflect a little. Where is it that they find occasion to triumph

umph in the perfection of human knowledge? Very seldom, indeed, will they find any just cause to reverse the declaration of the Apostle in the text, and to say that "we walk by SIGHT, and not by FAITH." Let them take a short view of human affairs, and consider the doubtful circumstances under which mankind are forced to act, in the most important concerns of life.

THE philosopher, who directs his attention to the contemplation of the works of nature, and the operation of those laws by which the material world is governed, pretends not that his favorite science is founded on any thing, but a gradation of PROBABILITIES. From having observed a uniform correspondence between certain causes and effects, he concludes that whenever he sees the same cause, the same effect will follow. In a variety of cases this operation, indeed, is so regular, that there is little reason for us to doubt its continuance, though it is by no means IMPOSSIBLE that

that it should cease. From the highest degrees of probability, philosophy descends, by a regular scale, to mere hypothesis and conjecture ; and sometimes her votaries not contented to be ignorant of truth, when no proper means of investigating it are to be obtained, are eager to disseminate falshood and error.

To many natural occurrences, which seem to affect the happiness and welfare of human beings, the light of science does not extend. We know that the four seasons succeed each other ; but we know not what untimely blasts might deface the beauty, and destroy the hopes of spring ; we can neither see, nor prevent, the sultry rage of summer, the pernicious rains that often fall upon the fruits of autumn, nor guard against the capricious rigor of the winter. How many fair prospects are cut off, and how much anxiety and distress arises from the weather, and the mere direction of the winds ! Of these we are almost entirely ignorant. “ It bloweth
“ where

“ where it listeth, no man knoweth whence
“ it cometh, or whither it goeth ;” but yet
the husbandman neglects not to sow his
seed ; and the merchant is content to trust
his fortune on the bosom of the ocean.
They must be satisfied “ to walk by FAITH,
“ not by SIGHT,” and to rely on the mercy
and the goodness of God.

THIS imperfection of human knowledge
is by no means confined to our researches
into the works of nature, or the operation
of her laws. The deepest schemes of poli-
cy, which the united wisdom of nations
has been enabled to form, for the common
good, have proved, after short experience,
to be replete with evil and with error.
Nor are the productions of legislative wis-
dom less fallible. How often do we find
it necessary to annul those laws which
our predecessors, with anxious solicitude,
labored to form, from a conviction of their
oppression, their inadequacy or partial in-
fluence.

IF we turn our attention to objects that more immediately regard the happiness of individuals, we shall find a still greater degree of uncertainty in them, and perceive, that on no occasion scarcely can we hope "to walk but by FAITH." The father whose first object, perhaps, in life, is to secure the welfare of a beloved son, endeavours to promote it by laying the foundation of a good and virtuous education. He then destines him to some profession, in which his talents may be called forth and viewed with admiration by the world. He longs to see him distinguish himself in the senate, to prove his courage and his conduct in the field, or to rise, by his own industry and merit, to opulence and honors.

A PLAN of happiness thus marked out by paternal affection, and prosecuted with unwearied care, who can censure? But, alas! such is the blindness of human wisdom, and so various are the uncertainties of this life, that a thousand accidents

cidents might derange, if not wholly destroy it. Nay, that course of action which, from motives of prudence and affection, we point out to another for his advantage, might from a strange perplexity of events, lead to misery and ruin; while other pursuits, less flattering, perhaps, at first, might in the end have proved prosperous and secure.

LET any one look back upon the path which he has already trodden, and he will easily perceive that he has "walked by FAITH, and not by SIGHT." His destination in life, his fortune, and, perhaps, his character, all took their rise from trivial circumstances, and depended on events which he could not even guess at, much less direct. It is to be observed, also, that the pleasing prospects of comfort and satisfaction arising from friendship, are not without a considerable share of that uncertainty which obscures the knowledge, and abridges the enjoyments of man. The heart is often fluctuating, and sometimes

times "deceitfully wicked." A change of circumstances may call forth dormant passions, or create in us new desires. We might think others less kind, perhaps, because they will not favor our vices, which length of time has discovered, and they might suppose themselves better than they really are, from the "strong delusion" of self-love, which teaches them to look, with an eagle's eye, into their neighbour's frailties, and to overlook their own. Hence arise murmurings and complaints, disappointment and enmity. Independent of every other cause of doubt and dread, death is ever hovering around us; and the awful uncertainty which is suspended on the fatal moment of our departure from this world, extends itself to all our hopes and comforts, all our prospects and pursuits.

BUT though death might cut us off in the midst of our career, when we are eager in the pursuit of some distant good; though all our pleasures might prove in

the end deceitful and vain ; yet do we on this account remain inactive, lost in despondency or lifeless indolence ? No ; how perplexed soever our path may be with difficulties, doubts and dangers, we “ run “ the race that is set before us ;” and, as far as relates to the enjoyments of this life, indeed, men run with blind and inconsiderate ardor.

IF there be further need of observation to prove the almost universal imperfection of human knowledge, we might remark, that we are, in a great measure, even ignorant of ourselves. We might suppose that we are virtuous, only because temptation is away ; and mistake the dead calm of insensibility for a conquest over the passions. We are too apt to persuade ourselves, that the indulgence of those desires which promise pleasure will be bounded by innocence, and often suffer from “ the deceit-
“ fulness of sin.” In such trying situations as we might have had reason to suppose our fortitude would have failed us,
we

we have been upheld with constancy and firmness; and on other occasions, when we thought to have gloried in our own strength, we have sunk under the oppression of fear and apprehension, fallen victims to temptation, or yielded ourselves up a prey to sorrow.

SUCH being the doubt and uncertainty that envelopes every subject of human enquiry, and every object of human pursuit, can we expect that religion should be the only thing, in which we might meet with no difficulties, and concerning which our knowledge might be perfect? If in the various concerns of life, we have acted with PROBABILITY only in our favor, and secured the testimony of a good conscience for having so done, when we have endeavoured, by honest means, to promote our worldly interest, shall we neglect our eternal welfare, because all our vain curiosity cannot be satisfied, and we are ordered to “walk by FAITH, and not by SIGHT?” God forbid. How indeed is it to be expected

that creatures, whose faculties are so imperfect, and whose power is so limited, that they cannot "go on in their way," through the ordinary affairs of life, without being perplexed with difficulties at almost every step, should be able fully to comprehend the dispensations of Providence, even if they were revealed to them, and look forward into the distant regions of futurity? In a science so important and sublime as that of religion, which is exalted so far above all others by its nature and its object, we might surely be contented "to know," as in every thing else, "only in part."

THE first motive which ought to make us acquiesce, with cheerfulness, in this rule of conduct is, that it hath pleased the Almighty Father so to ordain it. He best knows what is for our advantage, and though we are required to make use of that light which he hath been pleased to give us, yet he will not expect us to practise what we do not know. Happy would it
be

be for the world, if the merits of men's actions corresponded with the knowledge of goodness which they already possess! Till this is the case, it seems a degree of sinful presumption, as well as folly, even to ask, why the Deity hath not given us more perfect notions of duty, or clearer ideas of futurity; and must, at the same time, bring upon us greater self-condemnation for sin and disobedience.

BUT let not our notion of faith, by any means, be confounded with a slight and wavering belief, or distant expectation of the blessings of the Gospel. That would be a strange perversion of the sense expressed in the text, and could have but little influence on the government of our conduct. The faith of a christian in the promises of his blessed Lord is of the most steadfast and lively nature. Every one who examines into the evidences of christianity with candor, will find, that there is no worldly felicity which he can prosecute with half the assurance

of success, that he can the blessedness of immortality, by performing the duties of the Gospel.

FARTHER, reflection might now teach, though it could not previously inform us, that to walk by FAITH, is a rule better adapted to the nature of man, and the conditions of this life, than “to walk by SIGHT.” The contemplation of the soul’s existence in a state of eternal happiness or misery, is already sufficiently awful, though we do not know, and perhaps could not comprehend, the precise nature and degree of either. Were our knowledge more distinct on this head, we might be wholly disqualified for carrying on the business, and fulfilling the duties of life. Ideas of eternal glory occupying the mind in their full splendor, might kindle an enthusiasm, which would transport us far beyond the reach of all human concerns, and render life a burden to us. The sure and certain prospect, also, of eternal misery lying before us, and seen in all its terrors, would

would render us equally unfit for the enjoyment of this world, by overwhelming the soul with horror and despair. Even in the present state of things, the influence of these passions has, in some measure, been felt by persons of a warm imagination, and a weak frame of mind, who have indulged the disorders of fancy, till mere shadows had the force of reality, or who have suffered themselves to be frightened and deluded by others.

BESIDES, could we be certain, I mean beyond A POSSIBILITY OF DOUBT, that just such a course of action would ensure our future happiness, and that the neglect of certain duties would infallibly exclude us, FOR EVER, from bliss, such additional knowledge, even in the eye of human reason, could have no beneficial effects. But while we enjoy the faculties we at present have, it is utterly impossible that we should ever acquire this knowledge. We are incapable of it. We could no more form an accurate estimate

of the sum of moral actions in ourselves, or others, as they are complicated with principles and passions, with a variety of secondary motives and external circumstances, than we could number the particles of sand that lie on the sea shore.

BUT granting this could be obtained, some (perhaps, very many) might fall far short of this requisite perfection, and would be the gloomy victims of despair, or slaves to every gross and sensual appetite during their sojourning here. Doubtless they would not hesitate to fill up the measure of their iniquity, by every crime that procured them the least gratification; and the world would be full of rapine, fraud, theft and murder. While those distinguished few, who had attained their envied exaltation, would find the perfection of the soul at a stand. There would be no longer hope or fear to actuate it, and these are the chief springs of human life. Thus would the world be divided into two classes of mortals,

mortals, the one, happy and virtuous in a very high degree; the other, guilty and wretched, beyond all names of wretchedness. Between such beings, there could be no desirable communion; and such a state could hardly be deemed a state of discipline.

OBSERVE the man who in the common concerns of life has attained the object of his desires; were he doomed to rest satisfied with that, and his heart never suffered to open to other comforts of hope, he would in a short time, be discontented and unhappy. The chief pleasure and gratification of the mind is in the pursuit of bliss; when the good we aim at is such as kindles our ambition, and when we follow it with rational prospects of success. Such are the occasions, when "to walk by FAITH," is to enjoy the highest, and we may add, the most durable happiness, that this world affords.

BUT is it not strange that such a principle of conduct, and such a disposition of nature, should excite the most ardent pursuit after the vain, perishable and deceitful blessings of this life, and should have such a faint and ineffectual influence on our religious practice? Is it not almost incredible, that "hope should thus "abound," to quicken our desire for wealth and honors, and that it should fail us, or at least prove insufficient to urge us on with any vigor, when we have before us an immortality of bliss, and "a crown "of glory that fadeth not away?" With some I hope this is not the case. Far from wishing to lay any bias on the mind, which a rational enquiry into divine truth will not warrant, suffer me to recommend to you consistency of character, and to hope that you will act with the same ardor, and steadiness of conduct, in the prosecution of your eternal welfare, as you do in the pursuit of your worldly interests and pleasures. Do not presume to hope for perfect and unexceptionable knowledge, while
you

you are the inhabitants of earth. Hereafter, we are told, the veil of human infirmity shall be removed, and “we shall know, even as we are known;” but now it cannot be. Be satisfied therefore, and thankful for what you already enjoy, assured that it is the best for our present situation, and that it comes from the Giver of all good gifts. Trust and confidence, indeed, are the only proper grounds of assurance, on which a dependent creature can build his expectations to Divine Favor. They have their salutary efficacy on the heart, and inspire it with love and reverence. Were every mysterious doctrine that regards futurity laid open to our view, the faculties of the soul would want their noblest employment. The incitements of hope and fear, that give vigor to all our other pursuits, would here be wanting. The imagination would have no opportunity of exerting her powers, and the interest which arises from curiosity, and our thirst after superior attainments, would be lost.

WE

WE may, in some measure, judge of the truth of these observations, from instances that occur in our intercourse with the world. If any one informs us of a fact which we already know, we listen to it with indifference, as to "a tale twice told." However important it might once have been, it has lost its novelty, and its effect. But if one, of whose truth and goodness we had no doubt, were to assure us of circumstances that highly concerned our happiness, but which we did not previously know, or thoroughly believe, we receive the important intelligence with a considerable degree of interest and satisfaction. We may claim to ourselves some share of candor and ingenuousness for the confidence we repose in virtue, and, at the same time, shew it that deference, which superior wisdom and uncorrupted integrity have a right to demand. Under circumstances somewhat similar, though from much higher authority, were those "things of great joy," which the Holy Gospel

Gospel contains, proclaimed to all mankind.

BE thankful, therefore, for that boldness and access which we have, through our Lord Jesus Christ, to the Great and Lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, and above all, learn to cultivate that union of hope and fear, which is the vital spring of piety, and which the apostle so beautifully expressed, when he ordered his disciples to “rejoice with trembling.”

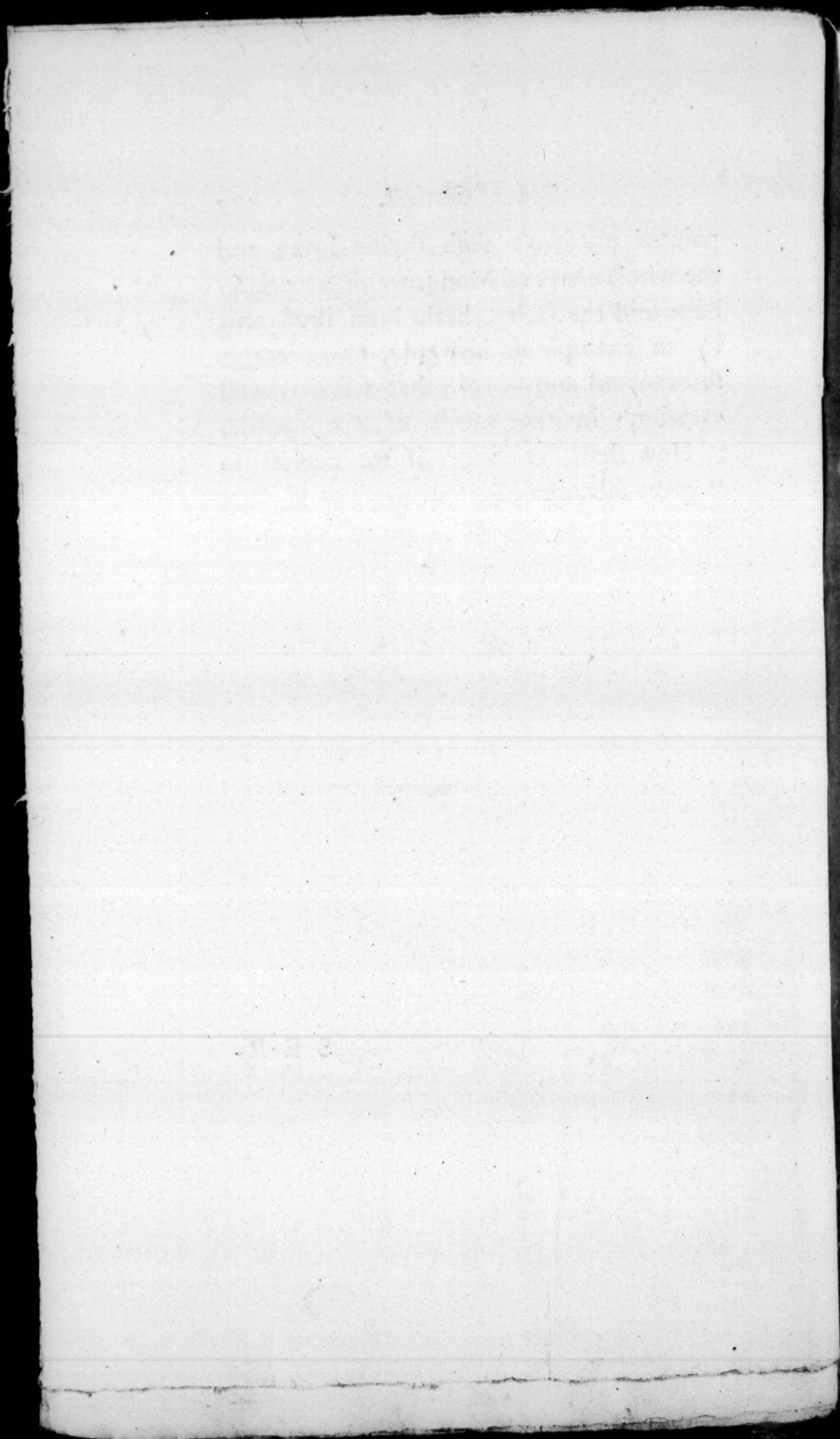
FAVORED as he was by divine inspiration, he no where represents himself in that vain-glorious situation, which many, with impious arrogance, pretend to enjoy. He still ENDEAVOURED “to make his calling
“and election sure.” He “kept his body
“under, lest while he preached to others,
“he himself might become a cast-away.
“He rejoiced in hope, and ran with patience the race that was set before him,
“looking unto Jesus, the author and
“finisher of our faith.” But as in other
“subjects

subjects that fall within the limits of the understanding, there are certain elementary principles, which will not admit of doubt, so also in religion, there are certain introductory truths, which cannot be controverted. The first is, that this is a life of discipline, and that we most assuredly shall die. The second is, that nature has taught us we are accountable creatures. A third is, (if we can trust the voice of reason, the suggestion of instinctive affections, and the consent of all ages, on a subject where no sensible proofs can be obtained) that the soul is immortal. A fourth is, that God is just and good, and therefore a state of retribution must and will take place.

• THESE are sufficient, of themselves, to engage the serious attention of every thinking being, and make us “walk by “FAITH,” in a constant and steady course of piety and virtue. But all these have been so wonderfully confirmed by our blessed Lord and Saviour; the means of reconciliation and forgiveness have been pointed

pointed out with such divine love; and the whole Duty of Man towards his neighbour and the Deity, hath been illustrated by an example so heavenly, and precepts so beautiful and sacred, that we may well exclaim, in the words of the apostle, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation!"

S E R-



S E R M O N X X I .

ON HEARING THE WORD OF GOD.

M A R K i v . 23 .

If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.

IT is asserted by the Evangelists, that our Lord “taught men as one having
“authority, and not as the scribes; that
“his ministry was with power, and that
“the people wondered at the many gracious words, which proceeded out of his
“mouth.” The text, indeed, is a sufficient proof that he taught with the authority of a master. He had been delivering his beautiful Parable of the Sower,

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and though he was surrounded by promiscuous crowds, differing from each other in their religious tenets, their characters as men, and their occupations as citizens of the world; yet he gave the peremptory command to all, that "If any man
" have ears to hear, let him hear." He signified by this, that the precepts of his blessed Gospel were not like many of the Laws of Moses, confined to a particular people, but that they were obligatory on the whole human race. They were co-extensive with the powers of intelligent creatures, and spoke to every one that could hear, think or feel.

THE authoritative address, with which our Lord closed this parable, was highly seasonable, and, perhaps, salutary. He knew that the seed of the word would fall on different ground; some would be scattered by the way-side, and some would be choked in its growth by thorns and briars; much of it would fall on stony ground, where there was not sufficient earth to
cherish

cherish it, and some would fall on the good ground, which bringeth forth fruit to perfection. Though every one had "ears to hear," few only had the disposition to receive the word, or the desire to cultivate and improve it. In Judea almost every worldly cause combined to impede the progress of Grace and Truth. Nothing, perhaps, but the divine ministry of the Messiah, strengthened by miracles and wonders, could in any effectual degree have overcome their obstinacy and prejudice, roused their sluggish indifference to every thing that was new, corrected their depraved passions, or counteracted the overgrown influence of worldly interests and pleasures.

IN the present state of the world, christianity meets with many of the obstructions, which it did in the primitive ages of the Church. At all times, indeed, there have been many more ready to embrace the pursuits of interest, or to follow the gratifications of passion, than to listen to

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the calls of duty, or attend to those divine truths, which enable us “to grow wise
“unto salvation.”

IN discoursing, therefore, on the words of the text, suffer me to exhort every one to hear that hath ears to hear; or, in other words, to make a proper use of those faculties which were bestowed on him by the great and beneficent Creator, for the purposes of advancing, in the scale of christian perfection, from knowledge to virtue, from virtue to religion, and from religion to eternal happiness. It may be necessary, also, to consider some of the many arguments, that should banish from our minds all indifference on a subject of such high importance, and to recommend the proper means of hearing with advantage.

To expatiate on the many superior endowments, which the Almighty hath conferred on man, to dwell on the distinguishing perfections of reason and of conscience,
and

and to enumerate the many delightful satisfactions that result from the exercise of our intellectual faculties ; would be only to repeat those general truths, which have been long since familiarized to every man's mind, that is accustomed to reflection, and have been often made the motives of Praise and Thanksgiving to God. But in discoursing on the subject under our present consideration, we may ask, what does it avail, that man is thus eminently exalted above the brutes, and allied to the Divine nature, if he neglects to improve the gifts that have been bestowed on him ? Hath the all-bountiful Creator given us the eye, and shall we not see ? Hath he furnished us with ears, and shall we not hear ? The impression of sensible objects, indeed, we cannot well resist ; but if we ask similar questions with regard to our mental faculties, we might often discover the most wretched abuse of the divine bounty. We shall see many wandering through the dark and crooked paths of vice and error, with the light of reason ever ready to guide their

footsteps into the paths of truth. Checked at their first onset by the suggestions of conscience, and alarmed by the awful warnings of religion, many have notwithstanding run on in the mad career of wickedness, in despite of danger, misery and death ! Though conscious of a thousand frailties, though beset themselves with various evils, and exposed to numberless dangers, how many are wholly inattentive to such considerations, and in their intercourse with their fellow-creatures, cruel, arrogant and proud ! The eye, indeed, is seldom blinded to exclude the most trifling object that might afford us pleasure, and the ear is never shut to any thing that might contribute to our amusement ; but reason is often hood-winked to the precepts of virtue, and our consciences suffered to slumber and to sleep, while we follow the gratifications of passion. Fettered with prejudice and superstition, blinded by ignorance and pride, or enslaved to the world, many could hear the Son of God himself inculcate the sublimest truths,
and

and teach the most amiable duties, with scorn or indifference.

AGAINST such dreadful perversion, and slothful abuse of the talent entrusted to our care, let us be ever on our guard. Let us consider, that on the due improvement of our faculties, from the benefits of experience and the discipline of religion, every real blessing is founded. If while others slumber on their journey, or run with thoughtless indifference wherever passion points the way, we “ponder the path of life,” and “watch and pray lest we enter into temptation;” if while some listen with joy only to the calls of appetite, or the summons of pleasure, we attend to the voice of reason, and hear the gracious words of Him who “was the light of the world;” we shall not only rise in our own esteem and that of others, but, what is of infinitely greater consequence, we shall be “laying up treasures in heaven,” and be deemed more acceptable in the sight of God.

IN order to overcome that shameful negligence, which is so disgraceful to a rational being, formed for action and improvement in a life of discipline, as well as to wean our affections from "the sin that doth so easily beset us," nothing can be more effectual than hearing the word of God. Well might the Saviour of the world, when he revealed the will of his heavenly Father, exhort every one "to hear" that had ears to hear." What, indeed, could rouse them from the bed of sloth, or the indulgence of vice, if the doctrines of the gospel proved insufficient? God manifested in the flesh, offering terms of everlasting salvation to man; precepts of heavenly virtue, taught with such a union of meekness and authority, as the world before had no conception of; every relative duty of life illustrated by precept, and confirmed by example; the arduous duties of patient fortitude, and humble resignation, in the hour of sorrow and oppression, practised and made perfect by the sufferings of the cross; and, to crown

crown all, the Divine Author of this blessed system vanquished the powers of death, that he might become "the first fruits of them that slept," and was, at length, received up into that glory from whence he came. These are some of the illustrious truths which every human being is exhorted to hear; and, from addressing himself at first to a few obscure individuals, within the scanty confines of Judea; from saying to two or three poor fishermen, whom he casually met on the shore, "follow me," our Lord is now heard, and his word received, to speak in the bold language of Eastern poetry, "from the rising of the sun, even to the going down of the same."

GRADUAL and slow, it must be confessed, but yet uninterrupted, has been the progress of this divine grace; and happy for the human species, it is still increasing. With the propagation of the gospel we cannot but believe, that a thousand blessings are connected, even in this life, and more

are still dawning around us, in proportion as our understanding is more enlightened, and our obedience more perfect. Many of the impediments which the revelation of Christ found, in ages that were rude and barbarous, though crafty and ambitious, are now removed; and we, in particular, have more abundant motives for hearing it with increasing pleasure and attention.

THERE was a time when, to the other obstacles of bigotry and fraud, was added the gross absurdity of administering the word to the people in an unknown tongue. Instead of searching diligently in the scriptures for the will of God, and embracing that form of doctrine and worship which seemed most agreeable to reason and to conscience, men were obliged to subscribe, with implicit faith, or blind submission, to the arbitrary dogmas of others; creatures as fallible as themselves, with interest, pride and ambition actuating their minds, and tempting them to deceive. There was
a time,

a time, too, when cruelty and persecution, by the horrid perversion of sin, was pretended to be founded on a system of mercy and divine benevolence ; when the voice of modest enquiry was stifled by the threats of power, and every faculty of the soul held in abject bondage by torture and by fire. But, blessed be that all-gracious Power that ruleth over the whole universe ! “ the word “ hath free course with us,” and we need only good resolutions and devout minds, to know how to “ worship God in the beauty “ of holiness.”

THE sacred volume, which contains the knowledge of salvation, is put into our hands, with every assistance to help the ignorant, and accompanied with every exhortation to strengthen the weak. We may meditate on it day and night, with grateful piety, and form our own creed ; we may have recourse to the discipline and doctrines of that church which pretends not to infallibility, nor presumes to interpret any thing contrary to the written word
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of God, in order to settle and establish our tenets ; or we may resort, for admonition and instruction, to those sanctuaries which are open to all ; and in which the truths of the Holy Gospel are explained, and its doctrines regularly preached, “ to every
“ one that hath ears to hear.”

BUT it is to be lamented, that these superior advantages have never been fully made use of, nor have the many gracious opportunities of improvement that are afforded, been embraced with sufficient constancy and resolution. Many, instead of “ using their liberty, have sinfully abused “ it ;” while others, from some strange depravity, or uncommon weakness, will, even now, hear the wild dreams of superstition or enthusiastic folly, with greater pleasure, than they attend to the plain, important truths, and practical duties of christianity. Some are mere formalists, that hear with barren attention ; and others can treat religion, and its awful concerns, with indifference or neglect. So wholly engrossed

engrossed are many with the business and pleasures of the world, that they scarcely allow themselves time to reflect on the views of Divine Wisdom, in calling them into being, on the moral discipline with which the life of man abounds, or the frail tenure by which every human enjoyment is held. Provided the intoxicating spring of pleasure fails not, and the ordinary comforts of Providence still flow on, they care for nothing more. They are deaf to those admonitions which teach them to look up to “the Fountain of all Goodness,” with gratitude, adoration and praise; they hear not those warnings, which tell them how soon “the evil days will come, in which there will be no pleasure,” and when the soul must prepare to go into the hands of that Almighty God who gave it;—not to be polluted with vice and sin, but to be advanced in virtue, tried by sufferings, and qualified for the society “of just men made perfect.”

BUT though there are many, who are incapable of being actuated by gratitude,

or love, in their duty towards God, yet few are there whose minds are not roused to reflection by sorrow, misfortune and calamity. Should the storm of adversity suddenly rise, and sweep away the airy fabrick of worldly grandeur and worldly happiness; should the blind impetuosity of passion lead them to the borders of destruction; or the power of death snatch from them the partners of their joys; then, indeed, they might be mercifully led to think. Like the rebellious Israelites in the wilderness, who forgot the all-gracious Father, while he conducted them on their way through the trackless desert, and “fed them with food from heaven;” but when he slew them, in his righteous judgment, “then they sought Him; and turned them early and enquired after God:” “And they remembered that God was their strength, and that the high God was their Redeemer.”

IN order to avoid these alarming errors, which spring from an indolence of mind
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that is almost brutal, or the most corrupt dispositions of the heart, let us reflect, that “ the hour is at hand, and perhaps “ now is,” when the pleasures of the world shall be no more thought of, than the visionary slumbers of the morning; or if remembered at all, remembered only with sorrow and with shame. Soon will it appear to every human being, that existence hath proved a CURSE, and not a BLESSING to him, if when the hour of his departure draws near, he cannot indulge the hope of having secured the favor, or deserved the mercy of God.

LET the impression of this awful truth, which is so obvious, that it cannot escape the most ignorant, and so important, that nothing but the most guilty negligence, or “ a conscience hardened through the deceitfulness of sin,” can banish from the mind, persuade us to hear, as we ought, those tidings of great joy, which the Saviour of the world hath published to all mankind. Let it teach us to look up to the Lord and giver of life, at every age, and in every situation.

tion. Let us not, like the selfish and ungrateful Israelites, remember Him only in the hour of affliction and calamity ; but chiefly when we glory in the delights of youth, and the blessings of health ; when we enjoy the satisfactions of friendship and the comforts of prosperity ; then let us, with grateful reverence, “ lift up our hearts “ unto the Lord.” No vicissitude of fortune that can possibly happen to us, no distinction of age or circumstances, no business or pleasure, should render us indifferent to the truths of religion, or withdraw our attention from that awful Being “ in whose “ hands are the issues of life and death.”

THE Son of God hath exhorted every one “ to hear that hath ears to hear ;” and next to our hearing this divine command with an intention to obey it, is the duty of studying to obey it properly. There are many who hear, indeed, but who hear with little, or no advantage. The seed of the word is scattered with profusion throughout the christian world ; though very small is the portion that
“ falls

“ falls on that good ground, which brings
“ forth fruit an hundred-fold !”

BUT do you hear the word with joy, and would you treasure it up in your hearts as the pledge of Divine Mercy, as the principle and source of comfort and satisfaction here, as well as immortal happiness hereafter? Commune with yourselves on this important subject. Examine into the latent frailties and imperfections of nature; that you may neither be deceived by the temptations of the world, nor the delusion of those passions which spring up in your own bosoms. Do you, with godly sincerity, receive the important truths of religion, unadulterated with the impure alloy of prejudice, of vanity, and self-love?

PERHAPS, you hear with comfort and satisfaction, those vices forbidden, of which you are in no danger, from inclination, from your natural constitution, or some peculiar circumstances of life: When you
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are OLD, you might with pleasure listen to such admonitions as chiefly regard the errors of the YOUNG ; and while in the full enjoyment of happiness and prosperity, you might with a degree of self-approbation, join in the condemnation of such wickedness and disorder, as relate only to the WRETCHED and the POOR. On such occasions, perhaps, you will allow the word of God to speak " with power." But say, are you so willing to hear it, when it calls aloud against some darling vice? When it arraigns your favorite indulgences, or curtails you of vicious pleasures? Are you ready, in the strong and expressive language of the gospel, " to pluck out an eye, or cut off a right hand that offends you?" Unless you can do this, your hearing will be of no more service than " going out into the wilderness, to see a reed shaken with the wind." In the sight of God, perhaps, it might be worse than total negligence. While such " strong delusion" occupies the mind, it might teach you, in some measure, to pervert the laws

laws of heaven to the condemnation of your neighbour, and corrupt them, in order to favor your own imperfections.

LET it be our first study, therefore, to hear and receive “ the ingrafted word,” with pure and simple reverence. Let us remember, that it was given “ to cleanse our “ hearts from all iniquity,” and to lead our footsteps into the paths of peace. When “ the great and lofty One that inhabiteth “ eternity” speaks to us, through his only-begotten Son, it is our duty to obey with meekness and with fear. Whatever might have been the influence of prejudice or error, previous to our examining into the duties of religion, and the frailties of our own hearts ; whatever might be the suggestions of vanity and pride, or any other passion, we are required, “ as new-born “ babes, to desire the sincere milk of the “ word.”

Do not, then, like too many in the world, attempt to corrupt the purity of
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christianity by making its precepts and its laws subservient to your own principles and passions, instead of submitting to the needful discipline of heaven, and regarding it as the only sure guide to virtue and happiness here, as well as immortal bliss hereafter. Dreadful, indeed, must be that presumptuous sin, which would dare to mutilate the word of divine truth, in order to soften, or wipe away our own condemnation, while we admit it to speak, with full authority, against such crimes only as may not concern ourselves : It seems an attempt “ to turn the word of “ God,” as it were, “ into a lye,” and to maintain a sort of “ communion between “ light and darkness.”

FARTHER, if we are really interested in “ those things which belong unto our “ peace,” we should endeavour to make that interest uniform and constant. It should extend to all our actions ; it should be the rule and measure of our conduct,

and its influence should be felt as a gentle, but powerful corrective, throughout the whole system of life. As for those casual emotions, that arise only during the moment of exhortation, or those frail resolutions, which are formed only when temptation is away, and which, in the conflux of worldly passions and pleasures, are as soon lost, as the brook that mingles with the ocean, of what avail are they? The momentary suggestions of conscience, the warnings of religion, and the serious truths which experience will gradually impress on the mind, may sometimes indeed embitter our happiness here; but they cannot withdraw us from guilt, or secure to us the mercy of God, unless they are suffered to form our principles and regulate our conduct; unless they are supported by "faith unfeigned," settled by meditation, and improved by prayer. Let us never, therefore, hear the word of God without endeavouring, under the influence of Divine Grace, to form the most steadfast

resolutions of practising it. Think not that you derive any benefit from frequenting the places of public worship, or performing the duties of private devotion, if when you return to the world, you are not better in yourselves, more just and charitable towards your neighbour, and in a word, more fit to enter into the presence of God. The great, and, indeed, the only end of instruction, is edification and improvement. Without this, the words of Divine Truth, though heard with the most patient attention, with the most unfeigned submission, and deepest reverence, are of no more consequence, than “founding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.” The doers of the word, you will remember, are blessed, and not the mere hearers. It was the advancement of the human soul in every perfection, that the all-bountiful Father of the universe intended, by publishing to man a system of grace and truth. It was that we might journey, with greater comfort, peace and safety, through “this vale of darkness
“ and

“ and shadow of death,” that the Saviour of the world “ took up his abode with “ men ;” and that, at the close of life, the sincere Christian might be enabled with humble confidence to say, like him, “ Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” Unless these grand ends are answered, a time will shortly come, when it would be of no avail to us, whatever charms the vanities of life may now have, if the evil spirit of darkness were to take us to some lofty eminence, and offer us, by way of recompence for sin, all the kingdoms of the world, and all the treasures thereof.

“ TAKE up thy cross and follow me,” is the peremptory command of our Lord and Saviour. On the sacrifice of the world and all its guilty pleasures, to the grand duty of serving God and keeping his commandments, depends therefore the issue of eternal life and death. Without you can do this, to hear the word of truth, is only to hear the sentence
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of condemnation. As to the mere formal practice of devotion, or the empty profession of a christian, “ Verily I say unto “ you it profiteth nothing ;” without good works and a life of exemplary piety, “ our preaching is in vain, and your faith “ is also vain.”



THE END OF VOL. I.

